

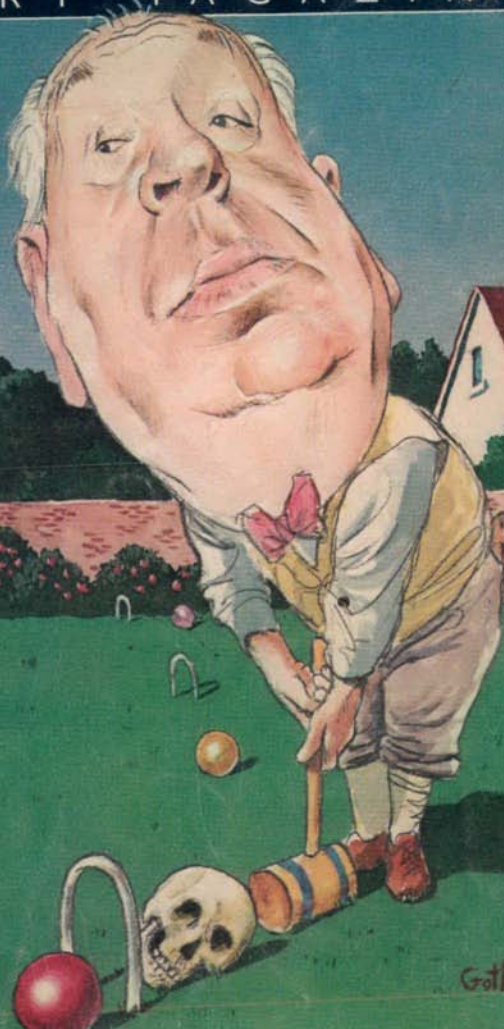
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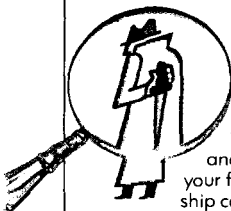
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

If you turn to page 4 of this issue, you will find there a readers' survey, with some explanatory information. Although the survey was designed for our newsstand buyers, we really would be very glad indeed for the responses of subscribers as well! We like to know as much as possible about all our readers—something about who you are, what kinds of stories you like to read best, what you think of AHMM. Subscribers should just omit any questions that aren't applicable to them.

In the meantime, a note of interest (we think), which is that May 1986—the month of the Mystery Writers of America's annual awards dinner in New York City—was designated "I Love a Mystery Month" in New York State, by Governor Mario M. Cuomo. In next

month's issue we will bring you the nominees and winners of all this year's Edgar Awards and details of the goings-on at the annual banquet.

And in this issue... Two stories, it seems, involving dogs—but very different ones. (See Pauline C. Smith's chilling tale "The Dog" and M. M. LaCour's "The Case of the Lost Collie," a new story about retired police chief Hec and his charming wife Elly.) Plus a new David Braly investigation set abroad—this one in Ireland, a puzzling locked-room story. Robert Gray has a new race-track story for us, Fred Hamlin (author of "Arnold," in our June issue) has a story with the unlikely title "The Clam Soup Connection," and D. L. Richardson has a new Hunter and Tyler story. And more besides!

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If you are a subscriber and would also like to participate, please also send this page to the above address, and circle the word "subscriber" below. Thank you!

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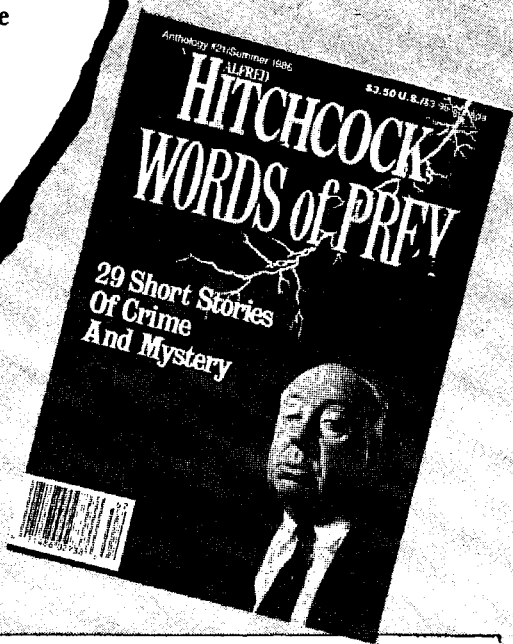
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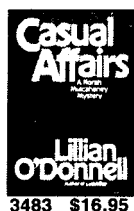
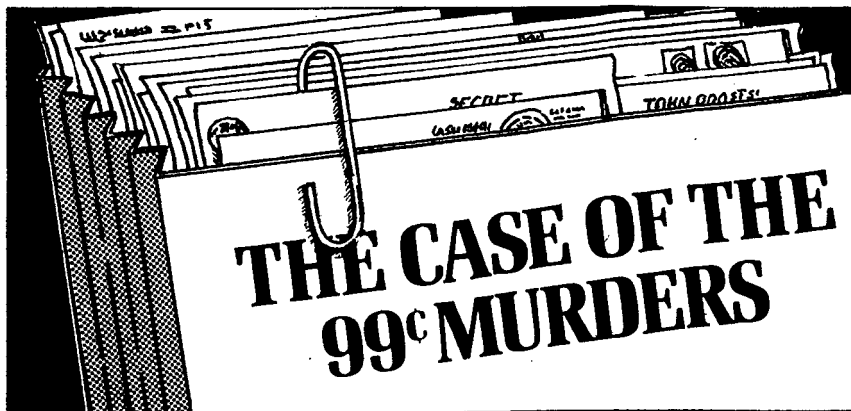
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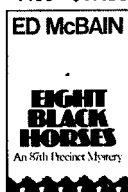
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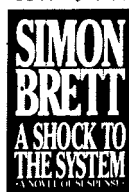
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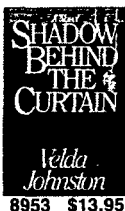
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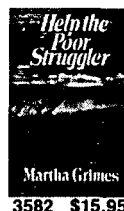
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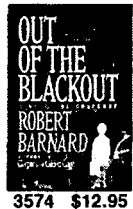
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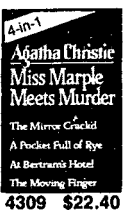
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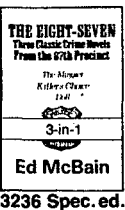
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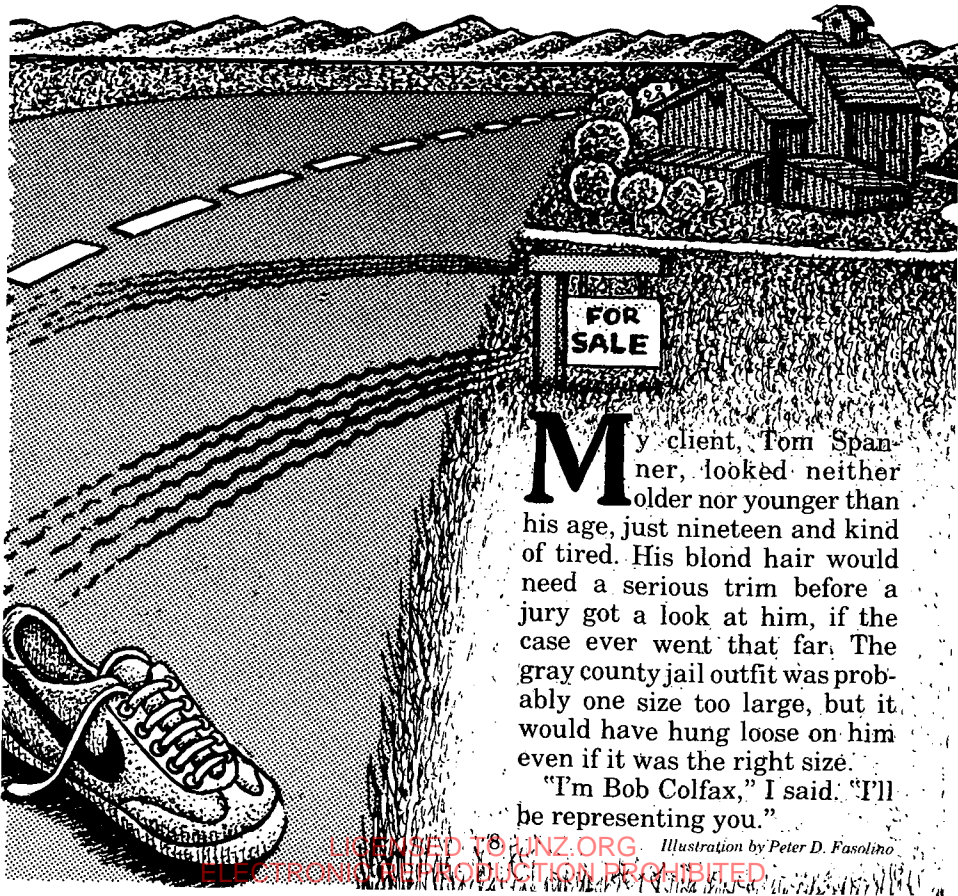
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FICTION

The Clam Soup Connection

by Fred Hamlin



My client, Tom Spanner, looked neither older nor younger than his age, just nineteen and kind of tired. His blond hair would need a serious trim before a jury got a look at him, if the case ever went that far. The gray county jail outfit was probably one size too large, but it would have hung loose on him even if it was the right size.

"I'm Bob Colfax," I said. "I'll be representing you."

Illustration by Peter D. Fasolino

His handshake was solid. "Hi. So I guess you know who I am. I don't have a lot of money."

"I've been appointed by the court, Tom. They'll take care of my fees and expenses."

The charges were grand theft auto and vehicular manslaughter with an ounce of marijuana for dessert. Based on the police report, I had already decided we were in plea bargain country. Given Spanner's age and no prior problems, it might not be total disaster, but in no way was it going to be fun.

With the story he had told the police, it looked like my first job would be to convince him that you can't con city hall, or the district attorney when he has all the ammunition. A lot of lawyers who start out as prosecutors, myself included, begin to think they can do no wrong. With the police and the lab specialists and the State of California all on your side, it's hard to lose. After two years of defense work, I'm learning humility.

"Tom, it's my job to see that you get the full protection of the law. I'll be candid. The cards are stacked against you. That's the bad news. The better news is that you have a clean record, and you didn't leave the scene of the accident. I'd guess we can work out a reasonable deal, if you're willing to go along with that."

I'd watched his body stiffen and the color come to his cheeks as I spoke. His response was very close to anger, but the voice was level and totally under control.

"Mr. Colfax, the first thing is, I didn't steal that car. The second thing is I didn't kill that lady. I was holding less than an ounce. Big deal—you probably have a bigger stash at home. If you don't even want to hear my side of it, how do I get another lawyer?"

It was not a smart mouth, just flat and matter-of-fact. An older than average nineteen-year-old.

"Okay. I had that coming. But I read the statement you gave the sheriff's office and it looks like trouble. That's a first impression, and maybe I took it too far. Let's hear you tell it."

From the way his eyes rolled, it was pretty clear that there was more fence to mend.

"It's like I told the cops. This lady, she said her name was Karen, picked me up where I was hitchhiking on 101. I thought it was a little weird. I mean, she was really goodlooking, a nice car and all. You usually expect rides from the freaks or students. She was kind of old, maybe thirty-five. I had this cardboard sign that said S.F., and she asked where in San Francisco I was going. I told her Palo Alto where my

girlfriend lives. So she said great, get in, now I'll have somebody to talk to.

"I threw in my backpack and we took off. We got seven or eight miles north of town and she looked at her watch and said she had one quick stop to make, and she hoped I wasn't in a big hurry. I really laughed. Eight fifteen in the morning, and I'd only been hitching half an hour—you can wait out there half a day.

"She turned off the freeway and drove toward the mountains for maybe a mile or so and then headed north. A mile or so and I saw this lady running, you know jogging, up ahead along the side of the road, and the car just swerved into her, bam, like that. It was so sudden I couldn't believe it happened at first, and then the windshield smashed and I looked back and saw her kind of bounce on the pavement behind us. She kind of flopped over to the side of the road and then just lay there. I could see one of her shoes was gone. It... it was pretty awful.

"She stopped the car and we both ran back and the lady was dead. We'd passed a driveway about a quarter of a mile back. It was a sort of a lane back into an avocado grove. Karen told me to wait in the car and she would go back there and call for help.

"I went back to the car like she told me. I saw this running shoe back where the skid marks started, and I thought I was going to be sick. When I got back to the car, I sat on the driver's side. The windshield on the passenger side was smashed, and I figured I could watch for a car coming either way, you know, with the mirrors. The lady we hit had these bright blue sweats and you could see her just lying there, looking busted up. It happened so fast. It sounded like a rock or something when we hit her."

Guilt or remorse or whatever, Spanner's eyes were seeing it all happen again. I guessed he hadn't been drinking or doing drugs. So much for diminished capacity.

"Tom, the police say your fingerprints were all over the steering wheel and on the ignition key, too. The only others belonged to the owner of the car."

"Mr. Colfax, I just told you. When I went back to the car I got in on the driver's side. I know I touched the steering wheel. I put my head on it when I thought I was going to be sick. And when we stopped after we hit her, the lady driving didn't turn off the engine—we just ran back. I turned it off when I came back to wait."

"Your prints, Tom. Nobody else's."

"I don't know what to tell you, Mr. Colfax. No, wait a minute. She had gloves. Driving gloves, you know, with the sort of macramé back and leather palms. She had gloves on."

If Tom Spanner was a liar, he was awfully good at it. The gloves seemed a little too convenient.

"What else did she have on, Tom? What did she look like?"

"She was a nice looking lady, like she took care of herself. Blonde hair, kind of short, like Ann Jillian on television. Green eyes. Really bright, like emeralds or something. She was about as tall as my sister-in-law, so that's five four or five. Some kind of designer jeans, they weren't 501's, and a sweater. It was white but it didn't look like wool. Cotton maybe. Not much makeup, but she had a good tan."

I had the feeling Tom Spanner would do awfully well as an improv actor.

"Anything else?"

"Let me think. She had on earrings. I remember them, they were like little ladybugs. One thing that was a little weird, Mr. Colfax, I don't think she had a purse. I know she didn't have one when we left the car."

I tried to remember the last time I had seen a woman in a car without a purse, and I couldn't. It's the little things that make you skeptical.

"You say she had earrings. Were her ears pierced?"

"Jeez, I don't know. No, they must have been. Those ladybugs looked like they were just sitting there. I almost thought they were real."

"Okay, then what happened?"

"Nothing. I mean the cops showed up and an ambulance and they shoved me around a little and put me in handcuffs and brought me in."

"So where did the woman go?"

"I don't know what to tell you. I saw her go back into that avocado grove to call for help, and I never saw her again."

"Tom, the police checked that house and there was nobody there. It had been up for sale for a month. And there was no phone call. Some man called the accident in on the emergency CB channel at eight forty-five."

"That can't be. It doesn't make sense. There wasn't another car by there until the cops came. Who called them?"

I shrugged, palms up and empty, to show him both handfuls of answers I didn't have.

"I'll do what I can. But I want you to think how this looks to somebody who wasn't there, a prosecutor or a juror, for example. . . ."

"Don't kid me, Mr. Colfax. If you don't believe what I'm tell-

ing you, let me get somebody else." Again, not a smart mouth, just very direct and more sure of himself than he had any right to be.

"I hear you. And I will check out whatever I can. That's my job. I'll assume what you have told me is true, but I also have to convince some other people who aren't on your side. And I am still responsible for seeing that you get the fairest shake I can. Even if it's not fair."

If you ever want to stare somebody down, don't look them directly in the eye. Focus right between the eyebrows. I don't know why this works, but it never fails. Tom Spanner focused on my eyebrows, and I blinked first.

"And with a clean record, Tom..."

"Yeah. I guess we better clear that up, too. I've been arrested before, but the charges were dropped."

"You *what*?"

"For car theft three years ago. I'd had this hassle with my brother Jack. He's ten years older, and I lived with him after our folks died. He'd grounded me for the weekend, and my girl called and wanted to see me. Jack and Betty, that's his wife, were out for dinner and a play and a party afterwards, so I took Betty's car and picked up my girl. Then Betty got sick at dinner and they came home

early. Jack blew up and called the cops and they picked me up. By then he'd calmed down, or at least sobered up, and dropped the charges. No big thing. I think he was more hacked that I'd disobeyed him than worried about the car. But with my luck it will probably turn up."

"I'm sure it will, but I wouldn't worry, Tom. If your brother explains what happened..."

"Don't count on it, Mr. Colfax. He and I don't get along real well. I was hitchhiking because he wouldn't lend me fifty bucks for the bus fare up to San Francisco. He had to drop out of college when the folks died, and he thinks I should be working instead of going to school. He gets pretty upset if I make waves."

"Well, anyway, thanks for your telling me. I'll see what I can find out, Tom, but keep your options open."

My secretary had left for lunch, and there were half a dozen pink phone message slips on my desk. One was from a local stock brokerage that for some reason always gives their trainees my name to practice cold calls on. Round file. Two were from my still small but growing list of clients. One was a particularly unpleasant divorce, and the other a paternity suit, more or less, involving a

St. Bernard and, incredibly, a Welsh corgi. In a new practice, you take what you can get. The fourth was Saturday's tennis game. Number five was because my rent check was still in the mail, and a pox on such impatience.

The sixth was from Randolph Alexander Jennings III, a sometime tennis opponent and assistant district attorney, and a most worthy competitor in either situation. He had graduated from Hastings Law School in San Francisco a year before I got my degree from poor old plebeian Southwestern in Los Angeles. We both passed the bar at the same time, me the first time out, him on the third try. I try to remind him of this as often as I can.

We had worked together for five years in the D.A.'s office until a kid I'd prosecuted for shoplifting hanged himself three days into his sentence. It took all of the fun out of prosecution for me, and I switched to private practice.

I guessed that Jennings wasn't calling about tennis and confirmed Saturday first. Maintaining priorities is one mark of maturity.

After you have known Randolph Alexander Jennings III for a couple of years, and if you have won enough tennis sets or verdicts to measure up, you are allowed to call him R. A. I have

achieved this state of grace.

"R. A., this is Bob Colfax. What's on your mind? I hope it's recreational."

"Ah, Mr. Colfax. How kind of you to return my call so promptly. It is, alas, not recreational." R. A.'s on-the-job vocabulary is about forty years older than he is. "I understand that you are representing one Thomas Spanner before the courts of the State of California."

"I'll turn it down if you're handling it, R. A. I get bored when they're too easy." It is impossible to insult him, but you have to keep trying.

"Tut tut, sir. A nice young lad. Except for the heinous nature of the crime I might be moved to mercy. That, Mr. Colfax, and the fact that he hasn't a leg to stand on. Shall we save the state some time and money on this one and move on to greater challenges?"

"If you want to plea bargain this early, your case must be pretty weak. Or have I intimidated you?"

"I would propose a most generous disregard of the car theft involved and settle for a guilty plea to manslaughter while under the influence of an illegal substance. The lad should be back on the streets by the time he's thirty, hopefully older and wiser."

"Stuff it."

"Have you talked to your client, Mr. Colfax? Have you been taken in by his fantasy, his grand fabrication? Was he candid enough to inform you that he has a prior arrest for making off with other people's cars?"

"I know that, and I know what happened, R. A."

"If, and I stress that word, *if* his version is accurate. And did our fine feathered felon tell you that he is majoring in dramatic arts, and has been working weekends at an improvisational theater?"

"Damn."

"Indeed, sir, I gather not. I'll be frank with you, Robert, I think this is a putrefaction. I resent the transients who befoul our streets, and I resent it even more when they steal our cars, and most of all I resent it when they kill our fellow citizens. And another thing is that Jennifer Rhoads was a classmate of Marti's at Pepperdine. They weren't that close, but it brings it into our back yard. In truth, I hope you don't plead him. I'd like the conviction, and I can get it. You know what I'm offering, and I won't negotiate. He's only nineteen, and you're a friend and that's the only reason I'm making any offer at all. Take it or leave it."

"One or the other, R. A. Give me a couple of days."

"Don't procrastinate, Mr.

Colfax, it is a vice and in this case a self-delusion. I would advise you to spend your time on better things."

"I'll let you know. My best to Marti."

R. A.'s wife is what is generally referred to as a mitigating circumstance. She's the only person I know who can let the air out of him and make him laugh at the same time. Their honeymoon has lasted throughout the six years of their marriage. R. A. is much easier to take when Marti is in the same room.

My client didn't want to bargain, and R. A. was offering no deal at all. I dug out the pink slip from the broker and returned the call just to be able to tell somebody an unambiguous no and make it stick. Very satisfying. I punched in another bunch of numbers, and reached a more welcome voice.

"Hi, Marti. This is Bob Colfax. I was just on the phone with R. A., and he said you knew the woman who was run down out past the airport. Can you tell me anything about her? I'm defending the fellow they've charged."

"I hope you lose."

"I hope whoever did it gets what they deserve. Could we settle for that? I'm not asking for help, Marti, I just want to find out what I can about Jennifer Rhoads."

"I really didn't know her that well, Bob. She was a phys. ed. major and I was in liberal arts. We started out together, but she was a fifth-year senior so we didn't even graduate at the same time. After we graduated, I only saw her at the alumnae lunches. Mostly small talk. That is, if you could get her off the subject of physical fitness. I think she married Harry Rhoads a couple of years after she graduated. He's older than she is. Was. They had no kids."

"Was their marriage okay?"

"As far as I know, at least by California standards."

"What does that mean?"

"Oh, nothing, really. We sat at the same table at the last alumnae luncheon and she got a little margarita-weepy. I think she thought Harry had a girlfriend, though she didn't actually say so. If you've met Harry, it's pretty unlikely. At least he's certainly not my type."

"I don't know him. What does he do?"

"He's an investment consultant, whatever that is. I think Jennifer may have been his biggest customer. She had family money, or at least so the girls said. I guess that's rumor, though. I really didn't know her that well."

"Anything else you can think of?"

"Not really. She always dressed well and had a nice

smile and watched her diet and ran five miles a day and she wasn't bitchy with waitresses, and dammit she's dead and it's just not fair."

"Hey, Marti, take it easy. I know it's not fair. I didn't mean to upset you."

"I know you didn't, Bob. I'm sorry. But I still hope you lose."

I soothed unreasonable clients for the rest of the afternoon and went back to my apartment for a cold Beck's dark and a TV dinner. And promised myself dinner out the next night.

Downtown Santa Elena has been redeveloped, which means that the main street has been shrunk to two creep-speed lanes and the buildings all pretend to be Spanish. The roofs are red tile, the stucco is heavy, and the windows are small as gunports. It's a style I call Barcelona Brutal, and anything over two stories high looks like a prison from the days of the Inquisition. Rhoads's office building was populated with CPA's, lawyers, and financial consultants. He had a corner suite on the third floor. When I walked into his reception area there were two secretary-receptionist types working at one desk, one obviously training the other.

They said, "May I help you?" in unison.

The first was crowding sixty,

a real no-nonsense ocean-going freighter who looked like she genuinely enjoyed telling people the boss wasn't in. I guessed she was not the trainee. The other was a Chris-Craft by comparison, much closer to thirty, and, to use the non-nautical term, a dish. Very short brown hair, pale blue eyes, an orthodontically perfect smile, and minimum makeup professionally applied. Her dress was more cocktail party than office, a subdued red offset by small, beautifully crafted double-ruby earrings. Her nails were long and the manicure was perfect. If she typed at all, she typed very, very carefully. She was seated, but I confidently assumed that the rest of the lady was every bit as toothsome as the visible portion. Colfax the happy bachelor made mental note to get a name before leaving.

I explained who I was and why I was there, and after stalling long enough to make it clear that I was an interruption and an inconvenience, the S. S. Brunhilde conveyed me into Rhoads's office.

He was in his late forties, heavysset, and had under-used smile muscles. The little finger of his left hand carried about three carats' worth of diamonds. The shirt and tie were both heavy silk, and the jacket was identifiably cashmere at

twenty paces. His rosewood desk probably cost more than my car.

"Mr. Rhoads, I know this is a difficult time for you, but I was hoping I could ask a few questions about your wife."

"I can give you ten minutes. I shouldn't do that. The death penalty is what that punk deserves. What do you want to know?"

"Frankly, Mr. Rhoads, I can't rule out the possibility that my client was driving the car. But I owe it to him to find out what I can. Did your wife have any enemies, anyone who might want to harm her?"

He laughed, more bitterness than mirth. "Jennifer? My Lord, she got along with everyone. Vanilla pudding. Never offended a soul. A regular Girl Scout. Why, she would even be after me if I criticized the household help, and Lord knows they need it. You have to keep them in their place or they'll take over. But you know that, Colfax."

"Um. Would anyone else have known she would be out running when she was?"

"Only anyone who knew Jennifer. Five miles over the same route every morning, rain or shine. You could set your clock by it. My wife is—was—a fanatic about physical fitness. Ran five miles in the morning, did twenty-five laps in our pool

at noon, Nautilus and aerobics in the afternoon. She talked about it all the time, and I mean *all* the time. Always after me to do more of that sort of thing, as a matter of fact. I never could see how you could make any money at it, though. Waste of time."

"You and your wife got along well?"

"I resent that, Colfax. Of course we did. If you're implying . . ."

"No implication intended, Mr. Rhoads. I'm just trying to find out anything that might help my client."

"Your client killed my wife. The police say he did it, and I want justice done. Your time is just about used up, Colfax." He punched a button on his phone. "Kel . . . uh, Miss Revere?"

"Yes, Mr. Colfax?" The voice was the younger woman's.

"Would you please show Mr. Colfax the way out? We have other things to do."

I took the hint, said thanks, and went out into the reception area before my escort arrived. Brunhilde was gone, perhaps to powder her ample nose. Miss Revere was still at her desk, where she was having a mascara problem.

"Hey, it can't be that bad. She looks like a battleship, but she probably has a heart of gold."

"Mister, you've got to be kidding. I had that third-rate harpy

under control five minutes after I walked in here. She's in the john crying her eyes out. I'm just trying to get used to these goddamn contact lenses. Mr. Rhoads said you were leaving?"

Colfax the happy bachelor did not press for a name or phone number.

That afternoon I drove out past the airport to see the owner of the stolen car.

If Rhoads's office reeked of decorum, Bill Henderson's rattled of chaos. It was a sort of converted garage bay that looked like a recycling center for old building plans and unfiled papers.

I had called ahead, so he was there when I arrived, and on the phone.

"I know we're supposed to be pouring that slab today, Arnie, but everything's going crazy. First my car is stolen, and then it's recovered and now it's impounded and I can't get it back and my secretary quit two weeks ago and my kid is flunking out of Cal Poly and my sciatica is acting up and my wife is mad at me because I let the car be stolen, like it was my fault. All I get done is talking to cops and insurance people and newspaper reporters and everybody else in town who wants to ask dumb questions and now you're on my back about pouring the slab. Give me a break, will you?"

Listen, I've got to hang up. There's another guy here who wants to ask the same questions everybody else asked. I'll get over there as soon as I can. All right? Okay."

He hung up the phone like he hoped it would break and stop bothering him.

"You're Colfax."

"Yes, I called earlier, and . . ."

"I know. Thanks for being on time. Listen, can you give me a lift over by Cathedral Oaks? We can talk on the way over."

He gave me the address and we took off.

"I wanted to ask . . ."

"About the car. I drove to the office early because we had an all-day job and I wanted to get started by seven. Quinn, he's my foreman, Quinn picked me up here in his truck at six thirty, just like he always does. I had the keys in my pocket, so don't tell me I left them in the car. When I got back at six that night the car was gone and I reported it stolen, but when I did the police said they already had it and could they talk to me. I was on the job all day, with the whole crew, so everybody knows where I was and I don't know where the other set of keys came from, and even when I get the car back, and Lord knows when that will be, I'm going to have to put it in the shop to get the fender and

windshield fixed. Do you know what a pain this whole thing is?"

"I was wondering . . ."

" . . . whether anyone else had a set of keys. I know there was one because I'd only had the car for six months or so and it came with two sets. They were probably around here somewhere, which doesn't make any sense because if I can't find them, I don't know how that kid could have, and there was no indication that anyone broke in. I got back at six but I can't remember whether the door was locked or not. I've got to get organized. Kelley almost had this place running okay, but I couldn't afford to match the salary she got on her new job. So on top of everything else I've been two weeks going nuts trying to find a new secretary. You know anyone who's available?"

"No, but I can check . . ."

"I'd appreciate it, but I'll probably waste two days interviewing airheads and get somebody who doesn't work out and have to start all over again. This whole thing is insane. You know what the police asked when I called them about the car? The first thing they wanted to know was whether I was behind on my payments, and second thing was whether I'd left the keys in it. Didn't even ask what kind of a car it was. You have any idea how soon I'll get

it back? No, you probably wouldn't. There it is, over on the left where the mixer is. Listen, thanks for the lift. Appreciate it."

He was out, yelling at Arnie, and gone. He had probably answered the questions I would have asked if I had been able to get a word in edgewise.

Because it was on the way back into town, I stopped by the county jail. The harsh fluorescent lighting made everyone look vaguely ill.

"Tom, I've checked around, and frankly I'm getting nowhere. Nothing looks worse than it did, but there's nothing that helps much, either."

"But it's been almost two days." The edge of confidence that he'd had before had gone just a bit dull.

"Can you give me anything else to work on? When did you leave down south? When did you get in town? What did you do before you got the ride?"

"My roommate lives here in town, and he gave me a ride up from school. He dropped me off downtown by the freeway. We'd left town there around six in the morning because he had to be up here early. It was probably about a quarter of eight when he dropped me off. Do you want his name?"

"If he's in town I can get it

later. Then what'd you do?"

"I started hitching, that's all."

"You said you had a sign that said San Francisco. Did you make it yourself?"

"No, a guy gave it to me, he was hitching, too. A Toyota pickup stopped, and there was only room for one, and he was there first so he went. He gave me his sign when he took off. Nice guy."

"I don't suppose you know his name."

"Sure. Rick."

"Last name?"

I don't know why I bothered to ask. Nobody under the age of twenty-five has one any more.

"Is there anything else you can remember, Tom? Anything at all?"

"You know, Mr. Colfax, there was one other thing I thought of, but I'm not even sure it happened. I mean I couldn't swear to it or anything. Remember I said I went back to the car and waited? On the driver's side so I could watch the road both ways? I thought I saw a car going away in the mirror. The thing is, it doesn't make sense. The car would have had to have passed by and one didn't."

"Color? Make? Anything at all about it?"

"No. Like I say, I don't even see how it could have been there. But I really think I saw it."

"Okay. That's not much, but

keep thinking. One other thing, Tom. I've talked with the D. A. and the deal he is offering is a rough one. I'll keep after it, but don't get your hopes up."

Yesterday's level stare was directed at his fingernails, and he shifted in his chair.

"Uh, Mr. Colfax. I saw the newspaper last night and I read what they had to say about me and the lady who was killed. Yesterday, when you asked me to think about how my story would look to other people, I guess I didn't see what you meant. The papers make it really sound bad. Scary. But I didn't do it."

It was not a hopeful note to end on.

Only two pink slips; a slow phone day. Nothing from the landlord, so the check must have arrived. The first callback was to an outfit selling tickets to a benefit circus for a disease I had never heard of. No sale. The second was a 415 area code.

"This is Bob Colfax calling. I'm returning a call from a Mr. John Dietrich. Is he there please?"

The voice on the other end sounded early-twenties, female, and half a time zone out of sync with the rest of us.

"Who? John who? Dietrich? That's *really* a nice name. I wish I knew somebody with a

name like that. I like your name, too."

In the background I heard a male voice say something.

"Oh, wow, you mean Rick. Sure he's here."

He'd recognized Tom's picture on a TV news program. He had called the Santa Elena police, who passed him along to R. A., who had passed him along to me. R. A. can be a jerk, but he's a fair jerk most of the time. Dietrich said he remembered Tom, and giving him the sign. He was also pretty sure that it had been around eight or eight fifteen in the morning, which meant that if Tom's roommate had dropped him off at a quarter of, it would have been awfully hard for him to get out to the airport to steal the car and get to the accident site by eight forty-five. Not much help, but it was the first independent verification of anything so far. I decided to call it a day.

There is a restaurant in Santa Elena run by a prize-winning Thai chef and a crew who are probably all his cousins. Most of the customers look like cousins, too, so I assume the cuisine is authentic. You can make a meal out of the pork saté appetizer and a bowl of the clam soup. The peppers in the clam soup make your eyes water and your

nose run and your lips numb, but the clams are wall-to-wall, and the overall effect is high voltage ambrosia. The peppers will wake you up at three in the morning, but it's still worth it.

So at three in the morning I was awake with a stomach full of happy clams practicing the Kingdome wave and a head full of what ifs. At the top of the list was what if Tom was telling the truth. If someone was trying to set him up, they had put together a very neat package. The only thing really working for him was the time factor, and that was verified by a couple of witnesses R. A. would have for breakfast. Everything else was based on Tom's unverifiable story. And that would be R. A.'s lunch.

I played games with it for an hour and a half until I came up with a scenario that might work. It was all guesswork, but I liked the logic so much that I had punched in the first five numbers of the first phone call I wanted to make before I remembered that it was four thirty in the morning. The clams and I went back to sleep and I woke up smiling at seven thirty.

I called the the California Highway Patrol at eight fifteen, and that shoe fit. The second phone call was to Bill Henderson, and that fit, too. The third call turned out to be

a series of six, but the sixth one paid off. The fourth, to R. A., took the longest, but I had expected that. He did not fight every step of the way, just most of them. I had to invoke Sacco, Vanzetti, Oliver, Wendell, and Holmes, and finally Marti, bless her heart, before he agreed to go along. By then it was ten o'clock, and from then until the phone rang at four, the hours had eighty-four minutes each.

"Mr. Colfax, I have a call from Randolph Alexander Jennings III."

"Put all three of them on, Jean, I think I'm going to enjoy this."

"Mr. Colfax, I believe I have some good news for your client. If you would kindly present yourself at the county jail, you will find arrangements have been made for his release. Under the circumstances it seems appropriate that you should be there to tell him."

With the paperwork done, Tom and I headed for a celebratory dinner. After the clams, a bland, non-ethnic steak seemed about right.

"Mr. Colfax, I guess I still don't understand what happened. All of a sudden the whole thing is over and I'm clear."

"Basically, Tom, we found a reluctant volunteer to take your place. In fact, two of them.

When your buddy Rick called, I really began to wonder what could have happened. The time and the place were both wrong, for starters. You didn't have time to steal the car and hit Mrs. Rhoads. Another thing made no sense. The car was stolen on the airport side of the freeway, toward the ocean, and Mrs. Rhoads was hit on the opposite side, toward the mountains. You had no reason to go over to the airport side if you were headed north, and there was no way you could have missed the on-ramp.

"Also, you said that you had seen Mrs. Rhoads's shoe *before* the skid marks started. The highway patrol confirmed that, and it began to sound like something more than an accident.

"If it was deliberate, who could benefit? Her husband, most likely. But a woman was driving. Rhoads had hired a new secretary, but she was dark-haired and blue-eyed, so that didn't fit. But Henderson, whose car was stolen, had just lost a secretary, and couldn't understand how the keys had been pilfered—he said he didn't know where they were himself. I called him this morning and asked the name of his former secretary. Guess who? Kelley Revere, who had just gone to work for Rhoads. But that didn't work either because we needed a green-eyed blonde.

"Clam soup. About a year ago I was dating an ad agency gal who had eyes as brilliant and blue as Elizabeth Taylor's. The violet orbs you die for. One night I took her to dinner at a Thai restaurant I go to and we had clam soup, which comes with very serious peppers. Her eyes teared up, and one of her beautiful blues fell out. They were contact lenses. Put Kelley Revere in green contact lenses and a blonde wig, and I might not recognize her if she walked into the same room. And the odds of your recognizing her *without* the wig and lenses were astronomical.

"Half the people in town knew Jennifer Rhoads's running route and schedule, but no one better than her husband. And from there it all came together. Kelley knew Henderson left early for his jobs, and rode with his foreman. She either had the keys to Henderson's car or let herself into Henderson's office to get them, and then headed downtown to find a likely fall-guy, and you were elected. She clipped Jennifer Rhoads and walked back to where Rhoads was waiting for her in the driveway. They waited until you were back in the car, called in the accident on his CB radio, and took off, leaving you hanging out to dry. You did catch a quick glimpse of the car, but that was a small risk for them.

They knew your story was too fantastic to be believed."

"I guess I don't understand how you got them to admit it."

"I didn't. You owe that to an assistant D. A., old Raving Aardvark Jennings. He agreed to call Rhoads into his office and ask him three questions, and then on his own laid on one very nifty bluff. First, he asked whether Rhoads knew that Kelley Revere had worked for Henderson and had access to the keys to Henderson's car. Rhoads twitched a little and said yes to the first part and no to the second. He asked how much, including insurance, Rhoads stood to gain from his wife's death. Rhoads started a 'see here' act and finally allowed that it would be a fair amount of money. Something over half a million, as it turns out. Then he asked if it was usual for Rhoads to give his new employees two thousand dollar ruby earrings—which is what those ladybugs were. That was the luckiest guess. Henderson said he wasn't paying Kelley all that much, and the earrings looked new, so they almost had to be a gift. I called half a dozen jewelry stores and said I was looking for a pair like my old friend Harry Rhoads had bought. Just like I could afford them. Rhoads didn't ex-

actly answer the last question, but he did say he thought he ought to get a lawyer before he said anything else.

"You have to know R. A.—Mr. Jennings—to appreciate this. He has a 'gotcha' smile that makes Bill Cosby look like a grump. He just smiled and told Rhoads that he would be happy to give him the name of Miss Revere's lawyer if they wanted to share expenses. It was pure bluff, but Rhoads assumed that Kelley had already made some sort of a deal and came unglued. They picked her up at his office this afternoon."

The county provided a motel room so Tom could identify Kelley the next day and revise his initial statement. It took most of the morning, and when we left the courthouse I asked where he wanted to go.

"Well, Mr. Colfax, if you could just run me down to the freeway, I guess I'll hitch on up to my girlfriend's."

The client is not always right. I drove him out to the airport, bought him a ticket to San Francisco, and waited until I saw his plane take off. I will bury the plane ticket under an assumed name in my expense report to the county, but you can believe my conscience is absolutely clear.

Irv the Bartender

by Gary Alexander



The Brass Misdemeanor is a watering hole around the corner from the courthouse. It's a hangout for us justice system types. In the late afternoon, like now, you can find any number of attorneys, judges, and detectives in here, bending their elbows.

Ray, my boss, is chief criminal deputy in the prosecutor's office. He likes to joke that if a fugitive stumbled in for a belt he'd be spotted, arrested, tried, and sentenced before he could get his paw out of the popcorn bowl.

But Ray wasn't joking today. Neither was I. An hour ago a jury

returned an innocent verdict on a computer embezzlement case. There were major league bucks involved and we *knew* the defendant, a CPA with a strong computer programming background, was guilty. I think the judge and several jurors knew, too, but the guy had covered a serpentine trail and stashed the proceeds out of sight, presumably in an offshore bank.

Ray was drinking scotch. I was doing my crying in frosted mugs of draft beer.

"Maybe we presented too much evidence," Ray said. "This amount transferred here, that amount laundered there. We probably gave everyone headaches. I know I gave myself one."

"The money, the bookkeeping," I said. "It was all electronic impulses. It was too, uh, too—"

"Ethereal," said Irv the bartender as he brought us another round. "Intangible. Nothing you can get a solid grip on and roll into court."

"Irv's got ears like shotgun mikes," Ray muttered to me.

Irv, with his bushy white mane and florid cheeks, looked like Hollywood's idea of a flamboyant trial lawyer. He might have been one. Speculation pegged him as anything from a police buff to a defrocked supreme court justice from a faraway state.

He gave no hint of his past life and deflected inquiries with a quip or an anecdote. Anecdotes were his specialty. He always had a story. Opinion was divided on Irv. Some swore that he was the world's most flagrant flimflam artist. Others believed him to be the sum total of human knowledge.

Ray was definitely in the former category. I walked a confused middle ground, alternating between awe and skepticism.

"Your average crime has a nifty geometric quality," Irv continued. "The lines eventually intersect and close. Computer crime is different. Variables are so arcane that your perimeter becomes a series of isolated outposts. Am I correct, gentlemen?"

Ray stared at his glass. He disliked Irv's stories and *hated* them when they were prefaced by abstractions and philosophical insights. "Here it comes," he said.

"Poleaxing your bad guy is enough of a chore without the added burden of proving that a crime has actually been committed, is it not? With those dratted machines—"

"Our boy made off with two-point-four million," Ray said, jabbing a finger at Irv. "That's a fact!"

"Not in the eyes of a dozen of his peers, sir. The ethereal thing,"

Irv said, tapping his forehead. "Consciously, they may have acquitted the man. Subconsciously, they dismissed the entire matter as a nonoccurrence."

"Well," Ray conceded.

"Which reminds me of a situation with many parallels."

"What did I say?" Ray told me. "Fasten your seat belt and hang on."

Gentlemen (Irv said), let's designate a firm as Smith Jones Associates, Inc. Names changed to protect the guilty and whatnot. Smith Jones was an employment agency located in a pricy downtown office tower. On a Monday morning, a frantic police report was received and promptly answered.

Mr. Bill Jones, junior partner of Smith Jones, was a young and prideful man—immaculately attired, tanned, and visibly upset.

"Our records were on these disks and now they aren't," he said, shaking a handful of computer disks. "They're blank. Erased. I came in early to review data on a prospect I was to meet later. I set up that particular disk in the computer. Nothing! Then I ran all our other file disks. The same. Everything had been wiped out."

It was noticed at the time, gentlemen, that their computer area was a large room occupied only by a table, two chairs, and, of course, the machine and its peripherals. Wear patterns in the carpeting indicated recent removal of desks and filing cabinets.

Nothing was said to Mr. Jones at the moment, but it is common knowledge in this microelectronics era that computer storage disks are delicate and moody critters. If you bend them, write on them, or expose them to extreme temperatures, dust, or magnetism, you risk a "crash"—loss of any or all data recorded. The system was obviously new. Therefore it was suspected that Jones had messed up and was covering himself by summoning the law.

"Why do you suspect foul play?" he was asked. "Smith Jones is just an employment agency, isn't it?"

"We are not an ordinary employment agency," he said haughtily. "We do not cater to job seekers who walk in off the street. We are executive search consultants who fill high-level management positions. Our clients are corporations who require top people for key slots. We use our contacts to recruit appropriate men and women. It can be, well, sensitive work."

"You mean you steal executives from other companies, Mr. Jones?"

He smiled tightly. "There is an odious term for what we do. We're known in the trade as headhunters."

"Do you believe a competitor is responsible?"

"Possibly. It would take someone in the profession, someone who understood computers, less than thirty minutes to copy our disks on their own blank disks, then erase ours."

"Vengeance? A corporation president who lost his right-hand man, thanks to you?"

Jones nodded grimly. "When we satisfy a client's needs, there can be hard feelings."

"When did you last see the disks in normal condition?"

"Early Friday evening. Everyone else was gone and nobody worked the weekend. Jim Smith, founder of the firm and senior partner, flew out of town earlier Friday to confer with a senior vice-president candidate for an aerospace concern that employs our services."

"Where are the disks normally stored?"

"Follow me," Jones said, walking into Jim Smith's office. "Jim resisted computerization. He has some old fashioned quirks. He insisted on having the disks kept here when they weren't being used. My backup disks, too. Thanks to that, they were also tampered with."

The massive rosewood desk was the workplace of a tidy, organized man, gentlemen. No mounds of paperwork stacked here and there. Ashtray, calendar, air purifier, framed photographs. That was it.

"Where were they this morning?"

"Normally they're kept in a drawer, but they were on top of the desk. Evidently the swine who did this to us forgot to replace them or was in too much of a hurry."

"Care to venture a guess who, Mr. Jones?"

He said nothing. It was then remarked that the computer looked mighty lonely in that big room.

"Very astute," he said. "I do not wish to falsely accuse, but because of the system, one person is no longer with us. Amy Brown. She was office manager and had been with Jim since he began the agency fifteen years ago. After we transferred our paper files onto disks, there wasn't enough to keep her and the other two gals busy."

"When did Amy Brown leave?"

Bill Jones cleared his throat and said, "Well, she and I never got

along. We had a blowup Friday and Amy stormed out. We had planned to keep her on, but with lesser responsibilities. I imagine this had been gnawing at her."

"Amy Brown had an office key?"

"After fifteen years, certainly. Jim doesn't know she's gone yet. When he flies in tonight, I'm afraid I'll have some explaining to do."

Amy Brown was an attractive woman in her early fifties, a divorcee with grown children who lived alone in an apartment. She was apprised of the situation.

"That little twerp is lying," she said. "I didn't quit. He fired me."

"Considering your seniority and the fact that Mr. Smith is the firm's ranking partner, does Mr. Jones have the authority?"

"Bill has been with us three years," she said. "He's a real getter, I'll concede that. Our business has more than doubled. I just don't know what would happen if I made an issue out of it. Mr. Smith is contemplating retirement anyway."

"Mr. Jones said they were trying to keep you."

Amy Brown laughed. "Bill offered to get rid of Judy, our newest hire, and make me a glorified clerk at half the salary. When I refused, he had an excuse to show me the door."

"Did you tamper with the disks, Mrs. Brown?"

"If I did, who would I hurt? Mr. Smith, that's who. He's a saint. His wife died last year. Why would I cause him more suffering?"

"If you didn't, who did?"

"Bill Jones, if you ask me. He's too efficient to bungle and ruin the disks. He did it on purpose. I've suspected for months that he's planning to strike out on his own. Jim refuses to believe me, but I'd bet anything it's true."

"With the files gone, Smith Jones will fold. Bill will miraculously develop a photographic memory and reestablish the contacts. It's a lot cheaper than buying Jim out."

Amy Brown began to cry. It was decided to not bother her further. Jim Smith was contacted at his out-of-town hotel and informed of the problem. The man sounded shaken. He wanted a personal contact as soon as possible, so arrangements were made to meet him at the airport.

Somebody, bless his suspicious mind, had a hunch that proved to be an inspiration. A telephone inquiry to Mr. Smith's airline,

specifically. Which led to another, to a dealer of certain devices sold for the home and office.

It was thought that the information received, coupled with the Smith interview, would clear the proverbial waters.

But it didn't. The murk became muck.

James Smith was impressive. Gray mane, expensive pinstripes, leather attache case in a strong hand. Since his flight arrived after official duty hours, the nearest concourse lounge was selected for the meeting. It surely lacked the charm of the Brass Misdemeanor, gentlemen, but with its relaxing atmosphere and beverages, a purpose was served.

"My God," Smith said. "Those silly disks! I should have known better."

"The computer was presumably Mr. Jones's innovation. You're the boss. Why'd you let him have his way?"

"It's been an evolutionary thing, but I woke up one morning and realized that I was senior in only the chronological sense. These days, our most active clients are those Bill brought in."

"Are you fairly comfortable, Mr. Smith? I mean, if you chose to retire tomorrow, could you get along without money from the sale of your agency?"

"Uh, yes. In fact, I had been contemplating retirement."

"Selling your interest to Jones?"

"No," he said. "Some of his techniques are, shall we say, cut-throat. I don't think I would enjoy my leisure years as fully if I did so."

Crunch time; gentlemen. Listen up. "Mr. Smith, your Friday flight departed at 9:05 P.M., hours later than your staff thought."

Smith sipped his martini. "Am I being accused of something?"

The question was ignored. "The disks could have been damaged by you, sir. You had ample time."

"As I stated, the computer is Bill's pride and joy. I don't know much about the contraptions."

"You wouldn't have to. We use computers, too. The jackets the disks come in have instructions for their care. Little pictures and warnings in three languages."

Smith was staring off at who knows what. "He'd told me he was going to discharge Amy. I perceived it as a showdown. *High Noon* and all that."

"Do you wish to make a statement, sir?"

"Yes, though in the form of a question. A hypothetical question. If a person committed an act of vandalism against *his own* property, how could it be deemed a crime?"

Oops, the sound of tinkling glasses, gentlemen. Empty glasses. Excuse me, please.

"My guess is that Smith did it to leave Jones high and dry when he retired," I told Ray.

"Who the hell cares," Ray said.

You do, I thought.

"But if you insist in drawing me into Irv's little puzzle, I'll go with Jones. Irv and his damn stories. He always steers us down a logical path and ambushes us at the end. Jones is a weasel. Smith is a straight arrow. Sneaky business like this is out of character for him."

"Amy Brown?"

Ray shook his head. "She had a motive, but I doubt it. She sounds like a professional victim. You know, what bugs me about Irv's stories is that he tells them as if he were there, but in third-person neutral as if he weren't."

Irv returned. "Sorry for the interruption, gentlemen. Where was I?"

"You were about to tell us your involvement in the case," Ray said.

Irv chuckled. "No, I wasn't."

"All right, we give up," I said.

"The air purifier on Smith's desk," Irv said. "It was discovered through the dealer that the gadgets contain electromagnets. Magnets are death to computer disks. Those pictures on the disk jackets? One is of a disk, a magnet, and the word NEVER in several languages. Purifiers are harmless enough unless they are placed *very* close to disks."

"And Jones allegedly found them next to the purifier?" I asked.

"On Smith's desk," Irv said. "We'll never know the exact proximity. Jones was queried again, but wouldn't or couldn't recall."

"You must have a theory," Ray said.

"Alas, no. The case is too nebulous for my small mind."

"Did you ever see the principals again?"

"Yes. There lies my murk and muck analogy. I attended Jim and Amy's wedding. It was lovely. Refills, gentlemen?"

"A double this time," Ray said.

FICTION

The Dog

by Pauline C. Smith



The morning after Aunt Sue called, Trudy phoned her office. "I can't be in today," she said. "My uncle died and I must go back home. Could I have a week off?"

Her boss said of course. Was there anything he could do? He was so sorry.

There was nothing he could do and really nothing to be sorry for, thought Trudy. She had never liked Uncle Fred, her Aunt Sue's husband, and she was sure no one else had.

She packed her bags, had the Masda gassed, and took off.

She thought about Aunt Sue as she rolled off the miles. They had given her a home during her last two years of high school and the one year of community college. Aunt Sue took the place of the mother she had lost, but Uncle Fred? Well, he was just someone married to Aunt Sue.

She arrived in the early evening and parked her car at the curbing. She leaned on the steering wheel and looked at the house she hadn't seen for more than a year. A small, white house, shaded by old oak trees and surrounded by a chain link fence.

She picked up her bags, opened the gate and walked up the path to the house.

Aunt Sue led her to the kitchen and talked about food.

"But I've eaten," said Trudy. "I stopped along the way."

"Oh well, then, some cake and milk?" urged Aunt Sue. "You had a very long drive."

With Aunt Sue's chocolate cake in front of her, Trudy asked about Uncle Fred.

"You know he'd been sick for many months," said Aunt Sue. "He knew he was going to die. He talked about it a lot. And he read everything he could get his hands on about death."

Trudy shivered. "He read about *death*?"

"Yes. He sent away for these books. Piles of them. And he read them all. He told me that after he died, he would be back."

"Be *back*?" cried Trudy.

"That's right," said Aunt Sue. "Those books he read on transmigration, reincarnation, and I don't know what all made him sure that he would come back somehow, some way. He said he didn't mind dying now that he knew he'd be back."

"Well," said Trudy. "Well, maybe that helped. Maybe it helped him face the end."

"Maybe it did," said Aunt Sue. She smiled. "I'm glad you came."

"Of course I'd come," said Trudy. "Have you made all the arrangements?"

"What arrangements?" asked Aunt Sue.

"For the burial. The funeral."

"Oh yes," said Aunt Sue. "It's tomorrow afternoon."

"What will you do now?" asked Trudy.

Her aunt looked startled. "You mean now that Fred is gone?"

"Yes, now."

"Well, I suppose I'll stay on right here. I've got the house and Fred's insurance. I'll probably do a little volunteer work at the hospital and the church. See people. Do things. Fred never liked to have me go anyplace or see anyone except him. Maybe I'll even learn to drive the car. . . ."

"Good," said Trudy.

"He never really wanted me to do anything except stay right here at home and take care of him."

"I know," said Trudy.

"Another thing—" Aunt Sue trembled with excitement. "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to get a dog."

"A dog?" said Trudy. "For protection?"

"No, no, no," cried Aunt Sue. "I mean a dog to love. You know, I always wanted a dog. Fred hated them. That's why he built the chain link fence around the yard. 'To keep the dogs out,' he said."

It was during the graveside service the next day that the sky darkened and the thunder began to roll. The minister shortened his already short eulogy, and with a sympathetic pat on Aunt Sue's shoulder, he left just before the rain started.

Workmen in slickers stretched a tarp over the still-open grave and took off, at a run, for one of the buildings on the cemetery grounds.

Trudy hurried her aunt to their parked car. "Well," she said, "this looks like it's going to be a bad one." She turned on the motor and switched on the lights. "Imagine! It's almost as dark as night."

At that moment, the storm broke.

Rain came down in blinding sheets. Thunder roared. Lightning forked. Trudy switched on her wipers. She drove the cemetery grounds slowly, peering through the wiper swipes of her windshield, and came out on Cemetery Road.

"This will lead me to the old back highway, won't it?" she asked her aunt.

"Yes. Turn left here."

Trudy turned and crept along the road, the wipers swishing across the windshield. "Aunt Sue," said Trudy, "lean back over the seat and see if I don't have an umbrella there on the floor. I usually carry one."

Her aunt leaned back and reached down. "Here it is," she said.

"Good," said Trudy. "It'll help us a little when we have to run

from the car to the—" and slammed on the brakes. The car skidded to a stop. A dog right-angled in front of her and galloped down the road.

"Oh boy," groaned Trudy, "where did he come from?"

The dog had become a blur in the downpour.

"He was there. All of a sudden, there he was." Trudy let out her breath and went limp. "I almost hit him." She put her foot lightly on the accelerator and inched forward.

She turned toward her aunt. "Did you see him?" she asked.

"I saw him," said her aunt.

They reached the old back highway. Trudy was relieved that there was no traffic. "Who'd want to be out in a storm like this anyway," she muttered. "Maybe a dog, though," her mind still on the dog she'd almost hit, "but the dog would just be trying to find a dry place. Right? I just hope he doesn't get killed doing it."

"He won't," said her aunt.

As they turned from the back road to Center, the rain slackened. "Not much, though," said Trudy. "Just enough so it isn't coming down in sheets. How do you feel, Aunt Sue?"

"What do you mean, how do I feel?"

"Well, now that the funeral is over—"

"It's over," said Aunt Sue. "That's all. At least I think it's over."

"What do you mean you *think* it's over?"

"Just that," said Aunt Sue. "Nobody can tell when anything's over."

"Of course they can," said Trudy. "Something happens. Something's done about it. Then it's over."

Aunt Sue did not answer.

Trudy turned from Center to First. Then onto Elm. "We're almost there," she warned. "Got the umbrella ready?"

Aunt Sue nodded her head.

"Front door key?"

"Yes," said Aunt Sue.

"All right." Trudy slowed to a stop at the curbing. "Now, make a run for it," she said.

Her aunt opened the door on her side and raised the umbrella. Trudy opened her side and ran around the car. Together, they unlatched the gate, squeezed through, and raced, bent against the rain, up the walk to the porch.

And stopped dead.

For there was the dog!

His brown coat was caked with mud, his mouth half opened in a fanged grin. He waited at the top of the porch steps just as if he belonged there.

"It looks like the dog that ran in front of the car," cried Trudy.

"It is," said Aunt Sue and took off, around the house and to the back door. Trudy followed at a dead run.

"Here," Aunt Sue threw the umbrella at her and twisted the keys on her key ring until she found the right one.

She unlocked the back door and yanked it open.

"But, Aunt Sue," cried Trudy.

"Get in here." Aunt Sue grabbed her, jerking her inside. The umbrella, still open, flew from Trudy's hand and rolled on the grass.

"Why did you *do* that?" demanded Trudy as soon as her aunt slammed the door. "Why did you tear around to the back? Look, you're soaked. So am I. . . . And my umbrella—"

"It was the dog," said Aunt Sue when she caught her breath. She was pressed against the door as if to form a barricade. "I won't go near the dog on the porch."

"Oh, come now." Trudy took off her aunt's coat and sat her down in a kitchen chair. She took off her shoes. "That dog won't hurt you. You said you liked dogs. Remember?"

Aunt Sue shuddered. "That's another thing," she said. "Maybe because I like dogs he became the biggest, meanest looking dog he could so I'd have something that scared me and something I didn't want." Aunt Sue started to cry.

Angrily, Trudy yanked off her own coat and stepped out of her shoes. "I don't know what you're talking about. Look, I'm going to make us some hot chocolate. Now you just sit there, Aunt Sue, and calm down. The dog'll go away. He was just trying to find some shelter from the rain. He happened to find your front porch."

"My front porch," said Aunt Sue. "There are many, many front porches between the cemetery and here, so he finds mine. Behind a fence and latched gate."

Trudy turned from the stove. "Maybe he jumped over the fence. And who says he came from the cemetery?"

"You did. You said, 'He looks like the dog that ran in front of the car.' And that was way out on Cemetery Road just before we turned off on the old highway."

Trudy turned back to the stove. "Lots of dogs look alike."

"Yes. Yes, they do," said Aunt Sue. "But this one left the cem-

every right after we did. Then he ran in front of your car. Then he worked himself through a latched gate and found my front porch. Doesn't that mean anything to you? Don't you think he's telling us something?"

"No, I don't." Trudy felt a chill travel along her spine. "What's he telling us?" She poured the chocolate into two cups and took it to the table.

"He is telling us he's Fred," said her aunt.

The cups clattered. Chocolate spilled. A scratching noise sounded from the front door.

"He wants in," said Aunt Sue. "Fred wants inside his own house."

"Stop it!" cried Trudy. "He's just a stray mutt that wants in any house."

Her aunt shook her head.

The scratching became frantic. The rain beat down. Thunder roared. Trudy cleaned up the spilled chocolate. . . .

"You see," said Aunt Sue, "I learned a lot during those months your Uncle Fred was dying. I learned about reincarnation; that is when people come back as people. I learned about transmigration; that is when people come back as anything, a bird, a plant, an animal like Fred. Fred told me about it. He said I could never be rid of him. He said I'd have to go on taking care of him as I had always done."

The scratching was loud and grating as if the claws were digging deep into wood.

"Do you believe it?" asked Trudy.

"I didn't then," said her aunt.

"Now?" asked Trudy.

"Well, now I know that Fred is here."

The scratching stopped.

The rain poured. The thunder roared.

But the scratching stopped.

"Aunt Sue," cried Trudy, "the dog has stopped."

"For just a little while," said her aunt.

"I think he's gone."

"No, he isn't."

"I'll go look."

"Don't open the door," cried her aunt.

"I won't." Trudy raced to the front hall. She pulled the curtain aside and looked through the narrow window beside the front door.

She saw the dog as he stepped carefully down the porch stairs. She remembered how Uncle Fred always walked carefully down those stairs. He used to say: "They're dangerous. The risers are too high. The treads are too narrow. . . ." but Uncle Fred complained about everything. Anyway, this was a dog, not Uncle Fred.

She lost sight of the dog in the rain, and returned to the kitchen.

"He's gone," she told Aunt Sue.

"Did you see him go?"

"I saw him go down the steps. But the rain—"

"Well, he hasn't gone. Just wait."

They waited. And it came.

The sound of scratching. This time on the kitchen door.

Trudy screamed.

Then she jumped as the dog gave two sharp barks, sounding like "Gertrude," the name Uncle Fred used to call her, which she hated.

"I'm going to phone the dog pound," she told her aunt and slipped into her shoes.

"What for?"

"To come and get the dog," said Trudy. "There's a leash law, you know. That dog shouldn't be running around loose. The pound'll pick him up and that'll be the end of him."

"I hope so," said Aunt Sue. "But I don't think it will happen."

"It will. It's got to."

Aunt Sue put her shoes back on and walked to the window in the back door. She could look down on the dog as he scratched away. There was a bald spot on his head exactly like Fred's bald spot.

She walked back to her chair and sank wearily into it.

The storm gathered force. The winds blew.

Trudy walked from the kitchen to the hallway and flicked the wall switch. The lights did not go on. So—the electricity is out, she thought, and wondered if Aunt Sue had candles. Of course she did. The hall was dark. It was early evening, but black as night.

Trudy found the telephone on its stand. She inserted her finger in the last hole of the dial and circled it.

She told the operator she wanted the pound. "The animal-whatever. The animal shelter."

"One moment please," said the operator.

Then—"Here's your party."

"There's a dog," Trudy said quickly into the phone. "He followed us—he's scratching at the doors. Can you come and—"

A streak of lightning brightened the hall and the phone went dead.

"No, no," cried Trudy and clicked the receiver. But the phone was gone.

She groped her way down the dark hall to the kitchen. There, gray light came through the windows.

"What happened?" asked Aunt Sue.

"The phone conked out."

"Of course," said her aunt. She cried out as if it hurt. "It's Fred. He won't let any outsiders in. The dog's even got a bald spot, Trudy. He's got Fred's bald spot. I looked out and saw it."

The dog growled from the back door. Trudy remembered how her uncle used to grumble when anyone reminded him of his bald spot.

"All right, Aunt Sue," she said. "Enough of that. You're bugging me. That's a dog out there, a common ordinary dog. If he's got a bald spot it probably means he's got the mange—"

The dog scratched at the door.

"Stop it," screamed Trudy. "Stop that. Go away. Get out of here." She turned to her aunt. "Look, Aunt Sue, I think we've got to get out of here. Go somewhere and get someone to come and take the dog away—"

"Not out there," cried Aunt Sue, horrified. "We can't go out there."

The rain was easing off. Lightning no longer flashed. The thunder did not roar. Trudy edged toward the door. She pressed her face against the window and looked down upon the dog. Sure enough, he had a bald spot . . . which doesn't mean a thing, Trudy told herself.

He scratched deeply on the door again and again. Then, abruptly, he turned and trotted away.

"He's gone," breathed Trudy. "This time, maybe he's really gone." She raced for the front door and, pulling aside the curtain, peered out, waiting for the dog to return to the porch.

He didn't come.

The rain had abated so that it no longer poured but dripped. But she was still unable to see as far as the fence, so she didn't know if he'd left the yard. Oh, he has, she thought—and back in the kitchen she told her aunt, "He's probably gone off to scratch on someone else's door."

Aunt Sue wasn't as sure, even after minutes passed without a sound of the dog. "What he's really done is he's gone off to figure out another way to get into the house."

"Oh, Aunt Sue, an ordinary dog can't figure out things like that."

"No," she agreed. "An ordinary dog can't . . ."

At that instant, a crash sounded within the house. Then a heavy thump.

Trudy tore across the room to the stove. She looked wildly about.

Aunt Sue sat straight in her chair. Not a muscle moved. "He remembered the loose screen in the bathroom," she breathed. "He climbed through the open window."

Trudy spied a heavy iron skillet and grasped it.

The dog bounded from the bathroom down the hall and sat, filling the doorway, the half grin on his face, fangs sharp and bright.

As close as he was, Trudy thought how much bigger he appeared—and fiercer.

The three were frozen in the faint light.

With the dog barring the way into the hall, Trudy and her aunt were trapped. If they tried to make it to the back door, the dog, in one leap, could mow them down and chew them to shreds.

Trudy didn't doubt but that he would do just that. His eyes blazed in the shadows of the kitchen. Spittle drooled from the sides of his mouth and turned to froth.

While the dog watched Aunt Sue, Trudy slowly lifted the skillet.

The movement, the deeper, shadowed movement, caught the dog's attention.

He turned and sprang.

Trudy hurled the skillet. She heard the crunch of bone. She felt teeth dig into her thigh and the spongy chill of froth slide down her leg.

The dog dropped. She edged around him and backed her way across the room. Thunder grumbled. The dog's body thumped convulsively against the floor. A lightning streak lit the windows. . . . In that moment and during that instant, the dog's body appeared to be haloed by that of a man which faded as the kitchen turned dark.

Trudy caught her breath and groped behind her for the table edge—something to hang onto, something to lean against. Thunder rolled through the sky again. Lightning flashed and the dog, just a dog now, lay quiet on the floor.

"So it was a dog after all. Just a dog," says Aunt Sue today.

"That's all." Trudy laughs with a quaver. "Of course, the dog happened to be mad and of course he happened to bite me so, of course, I had to go through all those rabies shots, but it was a dog after all. For that I am thankful. Just a dog."

"You said that all the time," says Aunt Sue.

"I did, didn't I?" Trudy answers. "I didn't know he was rabid, though, until I saw that froth. Then I knew," she shudders. "Hydrophobia means morbid fear of water. Did you know that, Aunt Sue?"

Aunt Sue nods. They had repeated this same conversation so many times that of course she knew. . . .

"So there it was—raining," continues Trudy. "The dog must have been *desperate* for a dry place. And *that's* the reason he followed us home."

"And we found him on the porch when we got there."

At this point in their reiterated discussion, Trudy wonders if her aunt realizes she has blown the practical, sensible, factual dog story all to bits and supplanted it with a theory, a legend, a myth of an Uncle Fred who, knowing where his home was, beat them to it.

She wonders.

She wonders if Aunt Sue saw the haloed image of Uncle Fred over that of the dog in the lightning flash that terrible funeral night.

Or did she see it herself?

She wonders if Aunt Sue sold her house and moved close to Trudy because she feared the return of something that might be a man.

She wonders.

She wonders about every stray animal she sees. Every plant her aunt buys and hangs in her apartment—the ferns with their fast-growing tentacles, the cacti with spines. . . .

Trudy wonders and becomes impatient with herself for wondering. Because, of course, it was a dog. A stray dog looking for a dry place. A dog with mange. A mad dog. It just happened, that's all.

But still Trudy wonders.

And she wonders if her aunt wonders, too.

FICTION

Never As Easy As It Looks

by Robert Gray



Illustration by Joe Jereda

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41
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm an artist, damn it. Race-track's my canvas. My hands are kind of like brushes . . . Wait a second. This is getting out of hand. A sculptor, maybe; that's more like it. Track patrons are my clay. . . . Still not right. Only one way to go. I'm just a pick-pocket. A dip. Simple.

Like most guys at the track, I have a can't-lose system. Unlike most, mine has nothing to do with jockeys, trainers, quarter splits, or track variants. It has to do with people who are preoccupied, distracted by the flashing lights of a tote board or the chaos of a dense crowd.

Especially a dense crowd.

I like crowds myself; and I love Saratoga crowds. Every August the old track becomes a gold-plated sardine can and the tourists jammed inside are my fish. They show up for their annual day at the races with picnic coolers full of Genesee beer, a half-dozen useless tip sheets, and no idea what's really going down here.

A Day at the Races; remember that movie? Marx Brothers. Chico tries to talk Groucho out of betting on the heavy favorite; says, "Sun-Up is the worst horse on the track." Groucho says, "I notice he wins all the time." Chico says, "Aw, that's just because he comes in first." And Groucho says, "Well, I don't

want him any better than first." You hear talk like that all the time at Saratoga. I love it.

Nobody knows me at the tracks I work: Belmont, Aqueduct, and Saratoga most of the year; Gulfstream and Hialeah in Florida for the winter. I'm just another average-looking punter, one of thousands with *Daily Racing Forms* stuffed in their jacket pockets and half-smoked cigars clenched between their teeth. My face used to be what a nun in the third grade called "cherubic." I still don't know exactly what the hell she meant, but it can't be good. Now that I'm pushing thirty and have added a couple of pounds, my lousy diet and too much booze have made my face look more like pink mashed potatoes.

Doesn't matter. Lots of guys look that way at the track. It ain't a spa. You don't go there for your health. What's important is that nobody pays any attention to me, and that's the way I like it.

I quit school in the seventh grade. Had an argument about American history with one of my teachers. He wanted me to learn some. When I hit him, they suspended me. Never went back. My old lady was dead and my father didn't work up much of a sweat looking for me.

I moved from Queens to

Brooklyn for no big reason, just to move I guess. Hit the streets, but I wasn't a dip then; just a punk with some talent for shoplifting. I didn't do so bad. Didn't do so good, either. At least I never got caught by the cops.

Mr. Cortazar nailed me one day, though. Grabbed me by the collar like a bad puppy as I was leaving a department store with a nice collection of watches up my sleeve.

Turned out Mr. Cortazar was what you might call a talent scout and ran this school in his halfway decent, weirdly clean tenement apartment. He looked like Ricardo Montalban gone to seed. A Scout leader type, he was looking to help the punks of today become the self-supporting professionals of tomorrow.

Like I said, what he did was run this school for pickpockets. It was a simple deal. He taught me how to dip like a pro, and while I was learning I had to turn over eighty percent of my daily take to him. Tuition, he called it.

I had to work like hell just to break even, but it was worth it over the long haul. You can't get an education like that out of books, man. And you want to know something else? I never stiffed him so much as a dime. Hard to believe, but I'm proud of it to this day.

The way I figured, he had a family to feed and needed the bread more than I did. His young wife was named Maria, a pretty Latin type; didn't speak much English. They had two daughters, a newborn called Rosa and a girl about my age, Angelica; a real tease, always cracking wise during my training sessions; always getting chewed out by her old man. But in a nice way. You could tell she was his pride. He told me more than once, especially on my bad days, that I'd never be as good as she was already.

I don't know how many other students Mr. Cortazar had. The lessons were always private. They were also tough. He used to wear this jacket with all kinds of bells attached in strategic places. He didn't consider me ready to graduate until I could pull a wallet from the inside breast pocket without making a sound.

Just before my graduation, I went with Mr. Cortazar to a special tailor's shop he knew of in Queens, where I was fitted for a brown, lightweight sport coat with a couple of dozen little pockets sewn into the lining for temporary storage of loot while on the job. The tailor's name was Mario and he kept joking that I'd better remember him out on the streets, just in case we met again during my busi-

ness hours. He thought that was real funny.

Mr. Cortazar told me that brown was my color. He said I should use it like a chameleon uses his skin. Then he told me what a chameleon was.

Blending in turned out to be what I did best. I was always invisible on the street as a kid. I learned how to make the way people ignored me really pay off.

As I walk across Union Avenue toward the track, I think about my love affair with Saratoga. It is an equal mix of greed, a thief's appreciation for quality goods, and a respect for tradition that grows inside me as I get older. August is like my summer vacation, profitable and relaxing at the same time. Good combination.

Standing on one of three long lines at the track entrance, with no shade to protect me from the afternoon sun, I try to take my mind off the heat by watching this guy in the next line, who's already breaking a heavy sweat through his ugly blue Hawaiian shirt. His cigar is twice the size of mine. Smells three times as bad.

When we reach the ticket booths, I see him pull a wallet out of the front pocket of his baggy slacks. He extracts some bills from a thick wad inside.

Nothing I like better than the way people flash cash at the track.

Without taking my eyes off the guy, I pass quickly through the gate, pick up a *Racing Form* at a makeshift newsstand, and watch my mark buy a track program nearby.

Just as he spins around, eyes locked on the program, I step into his path and let him run me over.

"Sorry, pal," he mutters, barreling past without so much as a glance.

I walk off in the other direction, transferring his wallet from the folds of my *Racing Form* to a pocket in my jacket.

For an hour I wander through the grandstand building. I choose my victims carefully, as I was taught to, singling out those who are busy handicapping or eating; who wear loose clothing or carry open shoulderbags; and especially those who are drinking too much and getting sloppy.

I make a bet on the early double: four to five. Ten dollar ticket.

The four comes in, but the five runs up the track. Probably still out there on the backstretch somewhere.

I don't have much time for handicapping. I just bet my lucky number all the time, forty-five. I put it in exactas, quinel-

las, doubles, whatever. How can I lose? Costs me a hundred maybe. I make that on one wallet. And when I hit on a bet, which happens now and then, it's like an incentive bonus. Gives me a rooting interest.

The hardest thing for me is to avoid the temptation to just go nuts and hit everybody in sight. I feel like a rich kid in a candy store here. All these people carrying all that cash are mine for the taking. It's too easy.

In the city, you have to be careful, real careful. Folks there are cautious, even paranoid. They think everybody they meet is going to rob or kill them, so just looking normal isn't enough. You really have to work. In Saratoga, they practically wear "steal from me" signs on their backs.

Mr. Cortazar taught me never to take such things for granted. He said a thousand times that nothing's as easy as it looks. Nothing. You need concentration, self-discipline, and you have to know your limitations.

I remind myself about those rules again and again. It's tough to keep your lessons in mind when horseplayers waltz under your nose counting their winnings right out in the open.

But I'm in control. I make my hits and move. No rush; no reason to be greedy. I've got the

whole month. Plenty of time to make a buck or two. After all, how much money does one guy need anyway?

A lot.

That's not to say I don't occasionally do something stupid. After all, I am at the track. Have to gamble once in a while. Like I'm in line to make a bet on the third race and I pinch a money clip from this drunk guy in front of me, take half his twenties, then put the clip back in his pocket. Just want to check out his reaction. But when he pays for his bets, he's too stoned to notice the difference. Should have taken more.

During the running of the fourth, I wander out to the paddock and watch the race on a monitor set high on the trunk of a pine tree. Irish Sis, a two-year-old filly, wins the race easily, catching the rest of the field asleep through slow early fractions, then drawing away down the stretch to win by five lengths. Irish Sis just happens to be the four horse. With the five, a late closer named Sunny Malone, getting up for place by a nostril, I hit the exacta to the tune of \$346.40. My lucky day.

After the race, I celebrate with a scotch, which is unusual. I don't drink on the job much, but this is Saratoga and my vacation so what the hell.

I decide to lighten my load

some and find a relatively private spot behind a tree in the saddling area of the paddock. Taking a small paper bag out of my pocket, I strip the wallets that have somehow managed to find their way into my possession. Out come the bills and credit cards. The rest goes in the bag, which I'll dump in a trash basket.

It's funny, but I never bury these bags. In a way I hope somebody finds them and gets the wallets back to their owners. I always wipe them clean of prints just in case. It's a weakness, I know, but there are family pictures and such inside, what they call sentimental value stuff. I have feelings like the next guy. The photos have a strange effect on me. I don't think anybody's ever bothered to take my picture, not even for a mug shot. It's like I'm missing out on something.

Work takes my mind off thoughts like these. Self-pity doesn't buy it around me. I take the escalator up to the second floor and peek inside the clubhouse. There's a Pinkerton guarding the entrance. He gives me the evil eye without even seeing me. Out of habit, I suppose. Probably can tell by instinct I don't belong in there with the high rollers.

Since I want no part of that action anyway, I keep walking

along a wide, sunny deck behind the oldest section of the grandstand building. When I head inside again, the darkness blinds me after all that bright sun, and the crowd is packed ass to elbow.

I make it through to the newer, more open east end. I'm now three money clips richer. I stop to check out the possibilities, pretending to study my *Racing Form*. I see that I'm two races behind and refold the paper.

I notice a couple of stoopers picking up discarded betting slips off the floor. They are checking for winners that might have been chucked away by mistake. Tourists especially have this unprofitable habit of betting a horse to place or show and, if it happens to win instead, thinking their tickets are worthless. Stoopers try to live off that. They're just about the lowest form of life at a track.

A potential customer is heading my way. She doesn't look like the grandstand type, so I figure she's slumming for a minute or two on her way to the clubhouse. She carries a leather shoulderbag with no clasp, the top wide open and angled behind her elbow, out of her line of vision. That's the first thing I notice about a woman.

Then I see that she's studying

her program intensely. That's good, too. She is wearing a yellow summer dress and matching wide-brimmed hat. What I can see of her face looks pretty. She is definitely a class act. I can't decide whether to hit on her for a wallet or a date.

I go with the odds, which favor the first option.

To anybody watching, it looks like I do nothing more than scratch my head as I pass by her. Only another pro could see that when my right hand, still holding the *Racing Form*, goes up to my hair, my left hand slips in and out of the shoulderbag, snatching a thin wallet.

The wallet is in my jacket pocket as fast as any magician could manage. I head for the escalator again. It's too dark up here. I want to catch some more sun. Besides, it's always good to keep moving. I get on behind a skinny guy in a brown suit.

When we reach the bottom, the skinny guy steps off and turns on me. I see the look in his eyes and know it means trouble, but when I try to step aside and maybe run for it, there's another brown suit in my way, and this one's big.

They take me to a messy little office where they shove me toward the farthest wall, which I hit square with my nose. I turn around slowly, testing my

beak for permanent damage or blood. The lady I just hit has come in and sits on the edge of the desk. She's smiling, but I don't smile back.

"What's your name?" she asks.

"Sunny Malone," I reply, hoping she didn't see the fourth race.

"Doubt it. But we'll straighten that out later."

"Why? What's the problem?"

I ask as innocently as I can, not even convincing myself.

She slides off the desk and approaches me, her face glowing under the yellow hat. Her goons stand by the door. I glance nervously around the broom closet office, anywhere but straight at her. I see the desk, right behind where she'd been sitting. There is a mound of wallets and credit cards and loose cash. A bad day for a few of my colleagues, too, it looks like.

She stops directly in front of me. Too close. Under the right circumstances, I could appreciate her face so near, the scent of her perfume, her piercing black eyes locked on mine. I'm not in the mood for it now.

She reaches up to straighten my collar, brushes some lint off my shoulder with her right hand. When she steps back she's holding a wallet in her left hand. The only wallet I had on me. Her wallet.

"What the hell . . . ?" I cry, shocked at the ease with which she has taken me.

She flips open the wallet, only it turns out to be no wallet at all. The badge inside catches the overhead fluorescent light and glows like it's too hot to handle.

It is. I see her photo and an I.D. card, then her name: Detective Angelica Cortazar.

I wince. I shrug. She smiles again and this time I smile, too. What the hell else can I do? You win; you lose.

"My father wouldn't be very proud of me," she says. "I'm afraid if he were still alive I'd be a big, big disappointment. Every so often we pick up one of you guys. Probably you don't realize it, but your style is as good as a set of fingerprints to me. Only my father's students have it. Kind of gives me a nostalgic feeling. I don't remember your name, but as soon as you hit on me it was as good as an introduction. Did I look like easy pickings? I try to. That's my job. But you should have

remembered that nothing's . . ."
" . . . as easy as it looks," I say.

The goons come over and bring me to the desk, where I empty my pockets while they make a list of everything on a form.

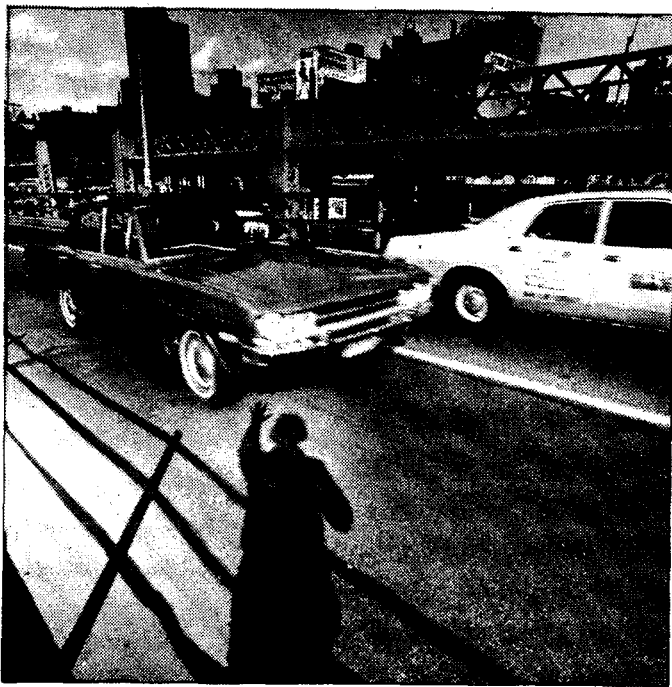
It's funny what goes through your mind. I think about the Marx Brothers again. In one of the movies, goons are searching Harpo for something. They dig in his coat pocket for ten minutes and pull out an amazing collection of junk, everything from a sled to a live puppy. I don't quite measure up to those standards, but the pile of cash and cards that comes out of my jacket soon dwarfs the original stack, and it had wallets to add bulk.

Guess I can take pride in that, but it's sure as hell going to be tough pleading innocent. At least I'll finally get my picture taken out of this deal.

I can't help it. I laugh. Detective Angelica Cortazar laughs, too. The goons don't laugh.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Arthur Tress

Follow that cab! (I'm shadowing a guy.) We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the April Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

The Gallowglass

by David Braly

Illustration by Nick Jainschigg

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Sergeant Brian Sullivan set the brake and cut the engine. When he turned off the headlights, everything around the small police car was enveloped in black except for small squares of yellow light from the windows of the house. Some of these yellow squares appeared to go on and off like ship blinkers because of the violent swaying of the tree limbs between them and the car.

"This is the place," Sullivan told his passenger, John McNamara.

"How do you know in this storm?" asked the locksmith. "It's too dark to tell a cottage from a castle."

"It's the only house on this part of the shore."

Sullivan forced open his door against the strong wind. The wind and heavy rain struck him like the blast from a fire hose when he stepped out. The wind's howl was so loud that Sullivan couldn't hear the car door when he slammed it shut.

Sullivan looked out toward the sea. He could not see it nor the beach. All that he could distinguish when he squinted his eyes toward the sea-bred storm were the black forms of nearby trees swaying against a black sky. Everything was black, windy, wet, and caught in the mournful howl of the storm.

Lightning flashed, followed immediately by a tremendous

explosion of thunder.

Sullivan pulled up his raincoat collar, then pulled down his visor to secure his cap. He stumbled to the front of the car, then to the opposite side, pushed by the wind.

"Worst storm I've seen in my life!" shouted McNamara when Sullivan reached him.

"Aye!" shouted Sullivan.

Sullivan grabbed McNamara's arm and they hurried toward the house. Its front porch was seventy feet away at the end of an ancient stone walkway that ran past an equally ancient stone wall. From a previous visit—it was too dark to see it now—Sullivan knew that the wall was only a crumbling, moss-laden ruin.

Wind-driven into a trot, Sullivan and McNamara quickly reached the porch. Sullivan carried his lead-encased, five-battery flashlight and McNamara a small metal toolbox filled with the gadgetry of his trade. The porch wasn't shielded from the wind, and horizontal rain continued to pound them.

"I'm surprised they still have lights," said McNamara. "Winds half this strong usually bring down the wires."

Sullivan nodded, then grabbed the brass knocker and pounded.

They waited.

No one answered the door.

Sullivan knocked again. After a half minute, he did it again,

as hard as he could. Still no answer.

Sullivan put his hand on the doorknob, tried it. The knob turned.

The sergeant pushed the door open, then glanced at McNamara. McNamara shrugged. Sullivan stepped inside. McNamara followed and shut the door behind him.

"I hope we don't get nabbed for housebreaking," quipped McNamara.

Sullivan ignored the remark. He looked down the narrow, dimly lit hallway that led to the stairs. No one was in sight. Nor could he hear the sounds of human presence over the now muted roar of the storm.

"Hello!" yelled Sullivan. "Is anyone home?"

Seconds later a white-haired woman appeared at the end of the corridor in front of the stairs. "Who's there?" she called.

"Sergeant Sullivan from Bandon, ma'am. Are you the woman who phoned about some trouble?"

"Yes, yes. Please come here."

Sullivan hurried down the hallway, followed closely by McNamara. The ancient oak floorboards creaked at their every step. Old candle holders were screwed into the walls, but the light came from dim overhead electric bulbs, three of which dully illuminated the sixty foot corridor. At the cor-

ridor's end, Sullivan found a stairway straight ahead, and another corridor that led away from the main one at a forty-five degree angle. The woman had come from this second corridor.

She was small, plump, and wore glasses. She looked like the sort of pleasant person who was normally happy and optimistic. She had that kind of face. Even now, when she appeared confused and frightened, Sullivan could see that normally she looked happy.

"This way, sergeant." She led them down the second corridor.

"Sorry to have walked in," said Sullivan. "We knocked hard but got no answer."

"I'm glad you came in. I don't know what I'd do if . . . I didn't hear you. . . . This wind."

She stopped abruptly in front of a door. Like the other doors in the huge house, it was tall and wide. The elaborate carving of the oaken woodwork revealed its antiquity.

"Here," she said. "George went in right after dinner. He's been in there ever since. When I tried to enter, I found the door bolted. George never bolts the door. Never. He has no reason to. We're the only ones here."

Sullivan tried the door. It wouldn't open.

"You said he went in after dinner," said Sullivan. "What time was that?"

"We finished about eight."

Sullivan glanced at his wrist-watch: it was twelve past ten.

Thunder cracked overhead.

"Are you sure he didn't come out and go into some other part of the house without your being aware of it?" Sullivan asked her.

"Quite."

Sullivan tried the door again, and of course it still remained immobile. He nodded to McNamara and stepped back. McNamara walked to the door and knelt before the knob. He placed his toolbox on the floor and opened it.

"This is John McNamara," Sullivan explained. "He's one of the best locksmiths in County Cork—and in any case the only one we could rouse tonight."

McNamara—sifting through his tools—looked up and nodded.

"Pleased to meet both of you," she said. "Forgive my lack of manners. I'm Mrs. Harrogate."

"Quite understandable," said Sullivan. "And everybody knows that the famous Dr. George Harrogate lives here, so naturally I knew who you were."

The lights blinked twice.

"Oh, no," said McNamara. "Not now."

The wind outside continued to howl, but the lights remained on.

"Is this Dr. Harrogate's study?" asked Sullivan.

"Yes," she said. "A library and office. He usually retires here after dinner to work on his current book or his sea camera plans."

Thunder banged overhead; the huge house shook.

"We've lived here for three years," continued Elizabeth Harrogate, "and this is the worst storm we've had."

"I've lived here all of my forty-seven years," said Sullivan, "and it's the worst I've seen."

"I can top you both in years." McNamara was busy worrying a file between the door and jamb. "And I can't remember a storm this bad—ever."

The lights blinked again.

"They're going to go out for sure," said McNamara. "Keep your flashlight handy."

McNamara continued to pry at the bolt. Finally he dropped the file back into his box. He scrounged around in it for a minute and lifted out a thin chisel. He inserted it between the door and jamb near the knob.

"It isn't budging," he said.

The lights flickered four times, then went out, leaving everything as black as the inside of a coal mine.

Sullivan clicked on his flashlight and turned its beam onto McNamara's chisel.

"Trouble in threes," said Elizabeth Harrogate. "First the

storm, then George not answering, and now the lights. All I need now is for the ghost to appear."

"Ghost?" said McNamara. "Is this old place haunted?"

"It's supposed to be. But we've never seen the naughty fellow in the three years we've been here. That was part of our attraction to it, too."

Sullivan knew the story of this particular ghost. Supposedly a MacSweeney gallows-glass had remained in the area after being wounded at the battle of Kinsale. He had built the original house that formed the center of this building, and had lived to be almost a hundred years old. MacSweeney had taken up arms again in the 1640's despite his advanced years, and all four of his sons had been slain then, fighting under Black Hugh. The story was that MacSweeney had sworn he would kill every Englishman he saw from the day of the oath "till the crack of doom." After he died, and ever since, the house's occupants had claimed that MacSweeney's ghost walked the hallways and stairways at night.

"It isn't coming, not even by a millimeter," said McNamara. "That's one good bolt you have there, Mrs. Harrogate."

"Can you cut it?" asked Sullivan.

"I have a tool that can."

"Well?"

"It's electric."

Sullivan turned to Mrs. Harrogate. "You said that the windows are nailed down?"

"Yes."

"On the inside or the outside?"

"Oh, the outside. Whoever nailed them down didn't want to ruin those beautiful oak frames. I imagine that's why when times became bad enough to secure them they decided to nail them down on the outside instead of installing latches."

"Do you have a claw hammer in the house, Mrs. Harrogate?"

"I've got one," said McNamara. "Shine that light on my box."

Sullivan did, and McNamara rummaged around until he found a small, wooden-handled claw hammer. He handed it to Sullivan.

"Are you going through one of the windows?" asked McNamara.

"Oh, sergeant, it's wet out there."

"The only alternative is to break open the door," said Sullivan. "A door like that wouldn't give easily, and the woodwork near the bolt would be damaged."

Three minutes later, after following Elizabeth Harrogate's directions about how to reach them, a cold and wet Brian Sullivan was standing at

the library's multipaned windows. There were two, and as Mrs. Harrogate had said, both were nailed down on the outside. Sullivan tried to lift each in turn, but couldn't. Five nails held down each window.

Sullivan shone his flashlight into the room. The drapes were open and he had as clear a view as the tobacco-stained glass permitted. He could not see anyone inside.

Lightning suddenly lit up everything around him, then thunder boomed.

Sullivan focused the flashlight beam on the nailheads of one window, then on those of the other. The nailheads holding the first window looked slightly larger, which would give the claw a better grip. Sullivan decided it would be those nails he would pull out.

It took several minutes. The nailheads were flush with the wood, making it difficult to get a hold. He had to dig into the wood with the claw points to get the grip, then press hard against the body of the nail to avoid tearing off the rusty nailhead. The hammer slipped many times, scarring the wood and chewing up the nailheads.

Eventually he managed to remove all five nails.

He lifted the window, which went up surprisingly easily.

Sullivan climbed through rapidly, then lowered the win-

dow again. He did it to keep out the rain before he realized that the rain could not enter because the wind was blowing it elsewhere.

The room was warm. Not as warm as Sullivan remembered the corridor's being, but a wonderful improvement on what he'd just left.

He shone the flashlight beam around the room. He aimed it at one object, then another: the rows of books in the bookshelves, the large old wooden desk, the globe, the oil paintings, the wooden filing cabinet, the fireplace, the old wooden radio, and the door.

Sullivan did not see Dr. George Harrogate.

Lightning flashed; thunder shook the house.

In the second that the lightning illuminated the room, Sullivan had seen something odd on the floor.

He aimed his flashlight at it.

A man.

Sullivan swallowed hard.

The man was lying upon the floor, his eyes half-shut in death. He was of medium height and build, had thinning grey hair, wore brown slacks and a blue sweater, and was covered with blood. The blood had also soaked the carpet around him. The cause of the blood was evident: a battleaxe was buried in his chest.

"Sergeant?" called Mrs. Har-

rogate. "Are you inside yet?"

"Uh, yes. Yes, I am."

"Have you found anything?"

Sullivan turned toward the door. He examined the area near the knob to see how the bolt above it had been slid into place. The bolt itself was large, black, iron. Really solid.

Sullivan turned around, his back to the closed door, and swept the room with his flashlight beam. No one was in the room except the corpse and himself. To be sure, he slowly swept it again and again, over-looking nothing.

Sullivan stepped away from the door. He looked under the desk, up into the fireplace chimney, and around the bookcases. He examined the windows for signs of entry other than his own. There were no hidden spaces, no exits other than the door and windows, and the other window was as firmly nailed down as the one he had entered.

And yet the man who Sullivan recognized from newspaper photographs as Dr. Harrogate lay on the floor with an axe in his chest.

An impossible way to commit suicide. It had to be murder.

But the room had been locked up, sealed from the inside! Not by Dr. Harrogate because his wife had said that he never locked the door.

Lightning flashed, briefly il-

luminating the eerie room again, sending a chill down Sullivan's spine.

"Sergeant?" called Elizabeth Harrogate again.

"I'll be right out, ma'am."

Sullivan walked over to the corpse. He stood at its feet, quietly examining it in his flashlight beam for almost a minute. There had to be an answer to how Dr. Harrogate died. Had to be.

The battleaxe was embedded deeply. Harrogate could not have wielded the axe with such force upon himself, even if the handle had not been pointing downward. Nor would the axe have come down with enough force to penetrate deeply if Harrogate had tossed it up and let it fall on him. The low ceiling wouldn't allow that much momentum.

Sullivan bent down and rubbed his thumb over the point opposite the embedded blade.

Dull.

It would require another person swinging the axe to bury it that deeply, for surely bones had been broken. Probably it would take another man to do it.

Someone knocked on the door. "Sergeant!" called Elizabeth Harrogate.

"Coming," said Sullivan, still looking down at the body.

He turned and walked to the door. Sullivan threw back the

heavy bolt, then opened the door. When he stepped out, he kept Mrs. Harrogate and McNamara back and closed the door behind him.

"What's wrong, sergeant?" asked Elizabeth Harrogate. "It's George, isn't it? Something bad has happened to him."

"Is there any other exit from that room?" asked Sullivan.

"No."

"Any way to bolt that door from out here?" Sullivan asked McNamara.

"None."

"Mrs. Harrogate, I must ask you to show me to your telephone. John, will you watch that door?"

"I'll stand here and lean against it, but I can't 'watch' it."

"That'll be adequate . . . Mrs. Harrogate?"

"Why do you want to use the phone? What's happened?"

"I need to call the station." Yes, thought Sullivan, call 41145 and let them call Dublin. Dublin because part of being a good police officer is knowing when to step aside and when your own colleagues should step aside because they too lack adequate skill to handle an investigation.

"We need a thoroughly trained, thoroughly experienced detective down here."

"Then George is—is dead?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Harrogate, but he is. He's been murdered."

Gardaí Detective Chief Inspector Phelim Kane arrived in Bandon by motorcar late the following morning, having first flown to Cork from Dublin. Kane was pleased to find that the storm had passed out into the Atlantic and that only broken tree branches and mud puddles remained to recall it to memory.

Kane had never been to Bandon before and found its quaint architecture, its many bridges, and its rolling, very green hills a visual pleasure. He had been told before he flew down that two churches here were the oldest and second oldest Protestant churches in Ireland, and Kane was interested because he himself was a Presbyterian. He felt less of an outsider in Bandon than he normally did in Dublin.

"The house is on the coast," Sullivan was saying as he started the police car. "That's a short drive from here."

Kane settled back to enjoy the passing scenery. Soon Sullivan began talking about the strange murder and Kane was unable to concentrate upon the view.

Sullivan was a talker.

Kane respected silent people more than habitual talkers, but Sullivan did sound knowledgeable. And he was probably rich in experience. Kane judged his

age to be forty-seven. Every inch of him looked the copper: he was tall, although shorter than Kane; muscular, although not as muscular as Kane; weathered, where Kane's broad face was smooth and pale; lean, where Kane was stocky; and his steel grey hair reinforced the impression of strength, where Kane's brown hair conveyed neither strength nor weakness.

"Haunted?" Kane said suddenly.

Sullivan's narrative stopped. "Uh . . . what?"

"Did I hear you say that the house is haunted?"

"Aye, that's the local legend, although McNamara, who's older than I, professes never to have heard it. The story is that there was an Irish gallowglass—you know, a mercenary soldier who fought for land grants as his pay—who bore the name of that most illustrious of all gallowglass clans, MacSweeney. He fought at Kinsale—which is just south of here—and remained in the area after the Irish and Spanish forces were defeated. Later he fought for the Stuarts and lost all his sons in the cause. The legend says that this old captain swore he would kill every Englishman he ever met until the crack of doom."

"Yet this was the English stronghold of seventeenth century Ireland," observed Kane.

"I would've thought that a gentleman who felt as Mr. MacSweeney did about the English would've moved to a more Irish section of Ireland—if the legend be true."

"Aye. But they say that no Englishman ever called upon him. In any case, the Harrogates tempted fate. Mind you, sir, I don't believe in ghosts myself."

"Why was Dr. Harrogate living in Ireland?" asked Kane.

"Taxes. Not just the usual Englishman seeking a lower rate. Although Dr. Harrogate was a famous scientist and inventor, he earned most of his income by authoring textbooks and science fiction novels."

"And Ireland doesn't tax authors," said Kane.

"Exactly. . . . He should've paid. He would've been able to live in a nice English manor instead of that old hodgepodge, and he wouldn't have fallen prey to a petty thief like Stritch."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Stritch. You told me at Cork that you'd arrested someone."

Kane saw a tiny smile of satisfaction form at the corner of Sullivan's lips.

"Aye," said Sullivan. "We questioned the neighbors and one told us that he saw Stritch last night. Pinned him in the beams of his headlights when returning home from Bandon. Stritch was on a bike, he was.

Pedaling along the Bandon road while the rain came in a horizontal torrent. He's an old hand at thievery, is Stritch. Mostly petty stuff. Never any violence until now."

"What was taken from the Harrogate house?"

"According to Mrs. Harrogate, the doctor's plans for that new invention are missing from the library. She can't really be sure that they're stolen until she has time to search the entire house, but she says they should have been in that room. We searched it carefully, sir, and found no sign of them."

"Did you find them on Mr. Stritch?" Kane looked out the side window at the ruin of an old cottage. "Or in Stritch's domicile?"

"No. But then we wouldn't, would we? I mean, Harry's a petty thief but he's nae stupid. He would hide them someplace or give them to someone to hide for him."

"I shall look forward to meeting Mr. Stritch."

"Uh, good. . . . Of course, we've got him already. What we really need is your help in discovering how he did it. That sealed room, I mean."

In a firm but pleasant voice, Kane replied: "I'm here to investigate *all* aspects of the case, sergeant."

"Well, yes, of course. All I meant was—ah! The house will

come into view now, sir."

The motorcar came to the end of a long, elevated hedge. When it passed the end of the hedge, an enormous old two story house surrounded by the ruin of a crumbled stone wall came into view. Beyond it was what appeared to be a steep drop bordered by ancient trees, then the ocean.

"It's beautiful, that old white house near the ocean, isn't it?" Sullivan looked at Kane.

But Kane was gazing over his shoulder at the hedge.

Less than a minute later they pulled up in front of the house. Both men got out of the car.

"Looks peaceful now," said Sullivan. "But not last night during that gale."

Kane nodded. He stood beside the car a minute, studying the house. It was surrounded by the crumbling stone wall. The old central portion of the house had been built of stone and mortar, while the two wings were brick. Ivy covered most of the older wall, and the sagging middle of the second floor roof was laden with lichens.

"Where is the library?"

"You can't see it from here. It's on the east side. The house is shaped like a topless square. We are at the bottom of the square, on the south side."

"Which side of the house was hit by the gale winds?"

"The south."

Kane followed Sullivan up the stone path that led to the porch. Sullivan pounded with the brass knocker; a woman answered the door and let them in. The sergeant introduced her as Elizabeth Harrogate.

"Nobody could sneak through this house," observed Kane as the three of them walked to the library.

Every step upon the old, warped oak floor caused a creak. Sometimes even the walls along the narrow corridor creaked, their own peace upset by the movement of the floorboards upon which they rested.

"George always said that the crackling floors and creaking doors were this house's best burglar alarms," said Elizabeth Harrogate. "But you couldn't have heard a gun go off last night."

"Aye," said Sullivan. "The roar of the wind was so loud that the locksmith and I had to housebreak when we got no answer to our knock."

"Really? And you used that big brass knocker on the front door?"

"We did, sir."

Inside the library, Kane meticulously examined every piece of furniture and the bookcases. He used his fist to make soundings of the walls, the floor, and the ceiling. He could not find evidence of any secret passages into the room, and Sullivan as-

sured him that his own measurements precluded that possibility as far as the walls were concerned. Sullivan occasionally pointed out something to Kane, but generally he observed. Mrs. Harrogate watched Kane's inspection in silence.

"What was here?" Kane pointed to hooks projecting from the wall.

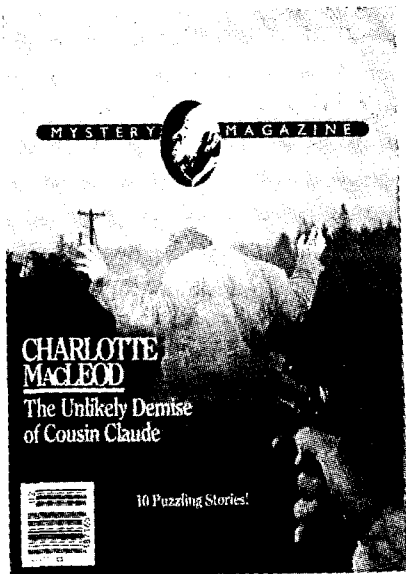
"The battleaxe," said Sullivan.

"Was it genuine?"

"Aye. Mrs. Harrogate told us that it was here when her husband and she moved in, so I contacted the widow of the previous owner, Hugh O'Kennedy, and asked about it. Mrs. O'Kennedy said that her husband's father bought the weapon at an antiques auction in Dublin. She wasn't sure of the year, but it was during the Great War."

Kane walked to one of the windows. He tried to lift it. It wouldn't budge. When he tried the other window it lifted easily, noiselessly. Then he knelt down and examined the floor beneath each window.

"No trace of moisture damage, even from your entrance," Kane said at last. "Of course, if the wind blew from the south and this window faces east, there probably wouldn't be. No rain would blow in. The killer, although perhaps as wet as you were, probably wouldn't leave any trace."



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"He couldn't have used the windows," said Sullivan. "The one you opened just now was nailed down as solidly as the one you were unable to lift. I know because I tried them both."

"Yes, well . . . You say the door was bolted from the inside?" asked Kane. Sullivan nodded. "Can it be bolted from the outside?"

"No," said Sullivan. "The locksmith couldn't move the bolt at all. I had to throw it back after I was in the room."

Kane looked at the chimney.

"We examined the chimney thoroughly," volunteered Sullivan. "It's too small for even a child to come down."

"And the fireplace interior? Did you examine it for catches or panels which open or . . . You didn't?"

Kane spent the next half hour examining every potential entry or exit point, starting with the fireplace. Carefully he inspected every brick, the damper, and a blackened metal plate at the rear. He paid special attention to the damper, trying to move its handle in every direction and even pushing and pulling upon it.

Next he examined the heavy wooden door. Kane closed and opened it a score of times, attempted without success to pull its old hinges up, and tried unsuccessfully to open it after the bolt had been slammed home.

It was possible only to pull back the bolt on the inside; there was no way to gain entry from the outside. Just as important, there was no way to slide the bolt home while standing outside the door.

Kane went outdoors to inspect the tall, tobacco-stained windows. He looked for footprints below them, but the ground was too stony. Kane picked up and examined the five nails that Sullivan had pulled out of the window stools and dropped onto the ground. He then examined the nailheads in the other window. The five heads were rusty; the wood was weathered, the paint having long ago peeled off. There were no holes in the frame where other nails had been, and only the five holes in the first window. Kane tested the strength of the panes and the wooden parts. All were firm. Each window was a solid whole.

Kane climbed up an unsteady old wooden ladder to the roof. He examined the portion above the library and found that there was a boundary visible there that was not visible from inside the house. One section of the house ended and another began at the north wall of the library. It took the form of two separate roofs, one a meter higher than the other. Elevated above the newer portion

was part of the original wall of stone and mortar. Decades of poor drainage had weakened it, and Kane opened up a hole in the wall simply by pulling out a large stone.

"Sullivan!" he called. "I've found the entrance. Bring up your flashlight."

Sullivan fetched the flashlight from his car and climbed up. His eyes widened when he saw the hole.

"You *have* found it," he said.

Kane clicked on the flashlight and climbed through the hole. He had anticipated encountering spiders and webs, but there were none. The space (one meter high and fifty meters across) was empty. There was no indication that any living thing had ever penetrated the area. The roof above this space, like the ceiling below it and the meter-high walls around it, was strong and solid.

Usually Phelim Kane was verbally restrained, but he left the strange crawl-space sputtering strong words.

The area beneath the library proved inaccessible. Elizabeth Harrogate's statement that the house had neither basement nor cellar was confirmed when Kane's probing proved that the old building had been erected atop a stony ledge as solid as the foundation of a castle.

"That settles it," said Sullivan after he accompanied Kane

back to the library. "I don't care if Stritch was near, Mac-Sweeney did it."

Kane smiled. He glanced around the library, hunting for anything strange, anything he had not seen before.

But now it was all familiar.

"I think it best," said Kane, "that I turn my investigation onto a different track, before I start thinking that old Mac-Sweeney is guilty."

Kane looked at a nearby chair, but then he glanced down at his filthy tweed suit and remained standing.

"You said that some plans were stolen, sergeant. What plans?"

"The plans for Dr. Harrogate's latest invention. Or at least it would've become his latest invention if he'd ever got it invented. He'd been working on it for a longer period of time than he'd lived in Ireland. I think about five years. He'd given press interviews about it and mentioned it several times when speaking as a guest lecturer at universities."

"So these are not secret plans?"

"It's well known that he's been working on these plans, and from what I understand it is the subject of some amusement in less creative scientific circles on the Continent. But the details of the camera itself are secret."

"He was working on a camera?" asked Kane.

"That's what he called it: the sea camera. Actually, sir, it's a computer. The idea—as I understand it—was to mount this contraption on an airplane or satellite and point it at large bodies of water. By some combination of photography and computer radar which Dr. Harrogate hadn't perfected, the machine would take a picture of the water and this picture would be free of particles, sand, salt, shadows, and all other obstructions. In other words, the developed photograph would show a lake or sea as being transparent. This will mostly be done by computer, much the same way NASA uses computers to sharpen images in blurred photographs."

"Remarkable. I've never heard anything about it myself, but then I don't follow scientific news very closely. We could finally learn if there is a monster in Loch Ness or if ruins of Atlantis exist in the waters near the Bahamas."

"Actually, Dr. Harrogate wanted to use it to mine ocean mineral deposits."

"Ah. . . . So the sequence of events can be summarized as follows: Last night, during a fierce gale, someone murdered Dr. Harrogate and stole the incomplete plans for an invention that potentially could be worth

millions, perhaps billions, of pounds. The killer committed the crime in this room. He—or she—then bolted the door (assuming that it was not already bolted) and left. Except that the only way to leave is the door, and if the killer had used it he or she could not have bolted it. And of course there is the murder weapon. A battleaxe."

"And Harry Stritch."

"Yes, your prisoner Mr. Stritch. A thief, you say."

"Aye. A petty thief with a long record. He's never before committed violence, but obviously Dr. Harrogate walked in on him and took him by surprise."

"Being surprised would explain why he grabbed the battleaxe," said Kane.

"It would. Stritch would never carry a weapon on him. He knows it would go hard with him if we ever caught him carrying one under those or any other circumstances."

"What sort of things has Harry Stritch stolen in the past?"

"Money, jewelry, appliances, that sort."

"Never any scientific plans or other papers?"

Sullivan shook his head.

"Has Stritch ever been here before, to your knowledge?"

"I thought of that myself, especially since the handyman also has a record, as it happens,

but Mrs. Harrogate said that she'd never heard of Stritch or seen a man answering his description. I also asked Mrs. O'Kennedy about him during our phone conversation. She said that she did not recall the name, and that she didn't remember ever seeing a man answering his physical description."

"I'll want to interview Harry Stritch," said Kane. "Now about this handyman?"

"Ron Pihilly. He's been the handyman and gardener here for about fifteen years. It's one of many small jobs he has. Comes out one to four times a month, depending upon the season. His criminal record is for some burglaries and a confidence scheme he ran years ago. Now he's an informer."

"Steady?"

"Aye. We hear from him about three to four times a year. His information is always good."

"Hmmm. I'll want to interview Pihilly, too. First I wish to talk to Mrs. Harrogate—but not in here."

The two policemen left the library. They found Mrs. Harrogate sitting in the living room, off the corridor near the front door.

The living room was square, large, and had a higher ceiling than other rooms in the house. Its walls were painted blue, although the other walls in the

house were papered. The furniture was modern here, and included a large television set.

Kane asked Elizabeth Harrogate to describe what had happened the previous night. While she talked he watched her closely, seeking any irregular eye movements, and listened for every tonal alteration.

"We finished dinner about eight," she said. "George left the dining room immediately, saying that he had work to do in the library."

"Was it normal for him to work there after dinner?" asked Kane.

"Usually he spent an hour there, then came into the living room to watch the telly. . . . But last night he didn't come, so I went to the library to tell him that one of his favorite programs was on. I found the library door locked. I knew instantly that something was wrong. I knocked and called his name, but he didn't answer. Thinking—hoping—that the noise of the storm had simply drowned out my efforts, I called and knocked much louder. I stood there for perhaps ten minutes pounding and shouting before deciding that it was useless. I already suspected that he was . . . But I was thinking of a coronary or stroke, not murder. That's when I phoned the Bandon police. That was about nine thirty, I think."

"Did you notice anyone around the house yesterday?" asked Kane.

"No one. George and I were alone here all day. There were no visitors, and nothing out of the ordinary happened other than that dreadful storm."

"Are you usually at the house?"

"Always."

"Always?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Harrogate. "One or the other of us is always here. I don't believe that the two of us together have been absent from the house more than twice during the last year."

"That clears up one mystery," said Kane. "It explains why the thief didn't wait until you were absent to break in, especially since he would have to keep the house under constant surveillance if he wanted to enter while you were gone."

Kane rose from the sofa and thanked Mrs. Harrogate for her cooperation.

"How long were they married?" Kane asked Sullivan when they were back in the police car.

"About thirty-five years."

"She holds up well. Not a tear."

The statement hung in the air for a long time. Then Sullivan turned the ignition over. "Where to?" he asked.

"First our informer friend

Pihilly, then a trip to the jail, for a chat with Harry Stritch."

Ron Pihilly lived in a cottage halfway between the Harrogate estate and Bandon. It was a trim little place, painted white, with an old blue Ford motorcar parked in front of the picket fence that surrounded the house. Flowers grew along the cottage walls; the yard was kept up nicely.

Mrs. Pihilly—a short, dumpy woman with suspicious eyes—answered Sullivan's knock. She showed the officers to two armchairs in the living room, then went to fetch her husband. He'd been working out back on someone's cabinet.

Ron Pihilly flashed a broad smile when he entered the room. "Why, sergeant," he said, "what gets you out of bed before noon?"

Sullivan introduced Kane to Pihilly and informed him of Dr. Harrogate's murder.

"He was a fine man, even though English," said the handyman. "He asked only what I could do and paid me my wage promptly, and that's more than I can say for some."

Kane watched Pihilly as he spoke. Pihilly's words sounded sincere and the man looked sincere. But there was something too smooth, too glib about this weathered little man.

"Where were you last night between eight and ten o'clock?" asked Kane.

Pihilly looked surprised by the question but smiled easily. "Now where would I be but in my own home?"

"You were here the whole time?"

"I was."

"Will anyone vouch for that?"

"The wife—at least for the time after eight thirty."

"Why not before eight thirty?"

"She was at her sister's, in Bandon."

"So until eight thirty you cannot prove that you were home?" said Kane.

"That's correct."

"If you were, say, to drive off somewhere in your motorcar and not return until, say, eight twenty, no one would know. There are no neighbors close enough to see your departure or return, nor to hear it."

"That's right. . . . Are you accusing me of killing Dr. Harrogate?"

Kane smiled. "At this time, I'm accusing no one."

"Good. Because I've not killed old Harrogate or anyone else. I've done some dark deeds in my past, stupid things, but that was years ago and I've learned the error of my ways. The sergeant here can tell you that I work closely with the police now. I'm a special consultant to them, and my advice and independent investigations have led to over fifty people going to prison. Right, sergeant?"

"Aye."

"Aye! The way I figure it, inspector, is that I can use the knowledge I acquired when I was operating outside the law to help the law now. I'm a professional crime-fighter just like you. The difference is that you're paid more and your professional status is recognized, whereas I don't receive recognition."

Sullivan grinned. "Do you want recognition, Ronnie?"

Pihilly smiled. "Nae, sergeant, I do not. At least not as long as I'm a consultant instead of an officer."

"Do you hope to become an officer?" asked Kane.

"I have a record. I doubt that I could ever be accepted into the force. Still, I read a great deal of fiction about police detectives and secret agents who were once on the other side. I see no reason why reality should not copy fiction when the idea is good. It's not fair for a man with my knowledge and talent to spend his life as a handyman. I deserve better. And, considering my understanding of crime and espionage—not all of which was gathered in detective and spy novels—I think I would be worth the salary."

"I know where your first-hand knowledge of crime comes from," said Kane. "But what's this about espionage?"

"In my younger days I had

my hand in. It concerned subversives here in Ireland. I can't reveal more. Perhaps Dublin can fill you in, if they're willing to declassify the files."

Kane was certain that Pihilly's talk of having been a secret agent for Dublin was nonsense, and he decided not to pursue this part of the conversation.

"When were you last at the Harrogate house?" asked Kane.

"Last week."

"Did you know about the invention Dr. Harrogate was working on? The so-called sea camera?"

"Everybody did. It was a combination camera and computer that was supposed to make water in photographs transparent. The Cork newspaper had a big article on it some months ago because of him living in the country and all. . . . What does the invention have to do with his murder?"

Kane told Pihilly that he had no further questions.

"We'll speak to Stritch after lunch," Kane told Sullivan as they drove back to Bandon. "First, I want to call Dublin."

"To find out if Pihilly ever did intelligence work?"

"Exactly."

"It would be significant if he did," observed Sullivan.

"It would be more significant if he didn't."

Kane did call Dublin and a

high-placed friend at the Castle promised to call him back with information within an hour.

Kane had called from Sullivan's small office, and had only just rung off when Sullivan returned. The sergeant looked like a man who had received a shock.

"It's the autopsy," explained Sullivan. "The report isn't ready yet, but they say—unofficially—that Dr. Harrogate wasn't killed by that battleaxe."

"What!"

"They say he died from a blow with a blunt instrument on the back of his head. The axe was probably buried in his chest less than a minute later."

"What sort of blunt instrument?"

"From the impression made upon Harrogate's skull, they're positive that it was a hammer."

"A hammer. No hammer was found in the room, was there?"

"No hammer found, sir."

Kane rose from the desk chair and began pacing the floor of the small office. "A hammer," he said. "A hammer, a hammer, a hammer . . ."

"A handyman would have—"

"So would every adult male in Ireland, sergeant. No, we cannot approach this from that angle. Rather, we must ask for what purpose a thief would carry a hammer? And how would it fit in with the other elements of this case?"

Both men were silent for several minutes, deep in thought.

"We'll go to lunch now—it's already late," said Kane. "At least now we can be certain that Harrogate did not commit suicide."

"Aye, it would be a bit difficult."

"Have one of your men phone the previous owner—what was her name?"

"Mrs. Hugh O'Kennedy is the previous owner's widow."

"Have her phoned and asked if any windows in the house, especially those of the library, were ever regularly opened during the time she lived there. Perhaps to air the old place out now and again."

There was no message from Dublin Castle or from Mrs. O'Kennedy when Kane and Sullivan returned from lunch, so they had Harry Stritch brought into Sullivan's office.

Stritch was a lean dark man with stringy black hair. He walked into the office with his back slightly bent forward, head up, and long arms dangling at his sides. His smile revealed tobacco-stained teeth. Stritch nodded at Sullivan, but examined Kane with suspicion. "Have a seat, Harry," said Sullivan.

Stritch sat down in a chair facing Sullivan's desk. Sullivan was seated behind the desk, Kane beside Stritch in a narrow office chair like Stritch's.

"This is Detective Chief Inspector Kane from Dublin, Harry. He would like to ask you a few questions about last night—if you're willing to answer them without having your attorney present."

"You know I'll answer," said Stritch. "I want to get this mistaken charge dropped so I can get out of this rat-infested ice-house."

Kane looked at Sullivan.

"Cold perhaps, but no rats here," said the sergeant.

Kane turned to Stritch and asked: "Last night why were you riding a bicycle during a storm?"

"I was riding for pleasure earlier in the day. I got caught in the storm, that's all. It struck sudden, it did."

"Did it?" Kane asked Sullivan.

"Aye, but the day was no pleasant one. Cloudy, chilly, and generally uncomfortable. All in all, sir, not a day that anyone would go biking in the country, especially the likes of Harry here."

"But that's what I did," insisted Stritch.

"Do you often bike in the country?" asked Kane.

"Yes."

"No," said Sullivan. "We know Harry's habits, and biking isn't among them. Harry hates exercise. Even if he overcame that aversion for one day, I don't pic-

ture him riding down all the way to the coast through a damp chill."

"But I did."

"I don't believe you," said Kane.

"But—"

"Forget it. I don't believe a word you say. If you want to get out of here, Mr. Stritch, I recommend that you tell us the truth."

Stritch said nothing.

"Have you ever been to Harrogate estate?" asked Kane.

"No."

"Ever met Dr. Harrogate?"

"No."

"Ever hear of the invention he was working on, this strange camera-computer?"

"Of course. Everybody around here has."

"You realize that even the incomplete plans for such a device would be worth millions of pounds?"

"I hadn't really thought about it."

"Hadn't you?"

"Why would I? It's none of my business. I mean, well, sure I've got a record. We all know that. But tell me what I would do with a bunch of papers. I mean, well, I know where to fence most property and I sure do know what to do with any cash that might find its way into my hands, but papers . . . I wouldn't know what man or company would be interested in them.

And I don't kill people. And if I tried to swing one of them old battleaxes, I would probably end up chopping my own foot off."

There was a sharp knock on the door.

"Come in," said Sullivan.

A constable entered and handed two sheets of paper to the sergeant. "You said that you wanted to know when these messages arrived and they were both just now phoned in, one right after the other," said the constable.

After the constable left, Sullivan read the messages and handed them across his desk to Kane.

The first read: "DUBLIN SAYS NO RECORD RONALD PIHILLY EVER EMPLOYED IN ESPIONAGE OR COUNTER-ESPIONAGE WORK BY GARDAI OR ANY OTHER IRISH DEPT."

The second read: "MRS. O'KENNEDY SAYS SEVERAL WINDOWS OPENED IN SUMMER TO AIR HOUSE, INCLUDING ONE IN ROOM CURRENTLY USED AS LIBRARY."

Kane stood and handed the messages back to Sullivan.

"Mr. Stritch," said Kane, "I must leave now, so you have only one last chance: why were you riding a bicycle near the Harrogate estate late in the evening during a storm that ranks with the worst in County Cork's history?"

"I told you," snapped Stritch.

"I was just caught in the storm during a pleasure ride."

"And would you be willing to take a polygraph test on that question?"

Stritch paled. "I want my attorney," he said.

A constable was called to accompany Stritch back to his cell.

"See what I meant?" Sullivan said to Kane.

"Yes, but I still doubt that Harry Stritch is our man."

"Why?"

"For one thing, I can't believe that he would go all that way on a bicycle to commit a burglary. Especially for papers. He's probably telling the truth when he claims he wouldn't know where to sell them. True, someone could have hired him to pull the job but . . . Another thing: the entry—or perhaps the exit—showed ingenuity on the killer's part. Harry Stritch doesn't impress me as ingenious."

"Then why won't he tell us why he was out riding a bike during a gale?"

"Probably because he was doing something else illegal or immoral, sergeant. I suggest you release him."

"Release him?" Sullivan stared at Kane incredulously. "Not unless you show me better reason than you've given, sir!"

Kane smiled. "I think I can, sergeant."

"Until you do, sir, Mr. Harry Stritch remains in our jail."

"It will necessitate another trip to the Harrogate house, but I was about to suggest that anyway. We will need to take along a claw hammer and a very sharp knife."

Sullivan got the tools, then drove Kane back to the Harrogate estate.

"We have three suspects," Kane said after they parked the car and began walking toward the house. "All three are suspicious."

"Granted," said Sullivan. "Say, aren't we going to the front porch?"

"No. To the library windows."

"Shouldn't we inform Mrs. Harro—never mind. I see her watching us from the living room window."

Sullivan and Kane waved at Mrs. Harrogate, and she nodded back at them.

Kane resumed his explanation: "Harry Stritch is suspicious to us because he is a known thief who was seen nearby riding a bike during a torrential storm. But that fact itself casts doubt on his guilt. Would he ride out here on a bike in order to commit a burglary? He wouldn't know that Dr. Harrogate would interrupt him. The burglary could have gone easily, but be discovered rapidly. That would lead to the

early arrival of the police down the Bandon road—the very road Stritch had to pedal down in order to return home. Also, he allowed himself to be seen. Notice that I say ‘allowed.’ In a storm like last night’s he would have seen those approaching motorcar headlights long before the vehicle’s occupants saw him. He had ample time to ride off the road and lie in the grass or even on the flat earth. He would never have been spotted at night in such a storm had he done so.”

“Then why didn’t he?”

“Obviously because he had nothing to fear—or thought he had nothing to fear. That means not only that he had no hammer or stolen papers on him, but that he had no knowledge of any crime’s having been committed. I think it’s a safe bet that with Stritch’s record he would have hidden from everyone if he’d known of any crime hereabouts, whether he had a hand in it or not.”

They rounded the corner of the house. The library windows came into view.

“And Mrs. Harrogate?” said Sullivan.

“My only reason for suspecting her at all was her lack of emotion when discussing her husband’s brutal murder. There may be many psychological reasons for that. The most important fact about Mrs. Harro-

gate is that she is obviously not strong enough to plant that heavy battleaxe so deeply into her husband’s chest—even when the man was flat on his back dead at the time.”

They reached the nearer window. “And Pihilly?” asked Sullivan.

“He has a motorcar and lives nearby. He could have easily murdered Dr. Harrogate sometime past eight and driven home before eight thirty with nobody the wiser. That hedge along the road that prevented me from seeing this house until we approached it could have concealed his motorcar from the Harrogates. Pihilly could have parked the vehicle on the other side of the hedge as a precaution, come here on foot, and then hurried back to the motorcar after he murdered Dr. Harrogate. Mrs. Harrogate couldn’t have heard the motorcar’s engine because of the storm. She apparently didn’t hear your motorcar’s engine that same night when you drove it up to the front of her house.”

“But if Pihilly did do it, *how* did he do it?”

Kane used the knife to dig around the head of one of the nails holding down the window. When he had exposed enough of the head, he used the claw hammer to extract it. The nail was three inches long, bent, and old.

Kane walked to the next window, followed by Sullivan.

"The central problem in this case has been how the murderer left the room," said Kane. "He couldn't have gone out the door, nor up the chimney, and both windows were nailed down."

"Right."

"But then we learned that the battleaxe was used only to make sure Dr. Harrogate was dead, not to strike him down. A hammer had been used for that purpose. And I kept asking myself, why would a burglar bring a hammer to a house he intended to rob?"

Kane pulled a plastic bag from his pocket containing the five nails Sullivan had extracted from the window.

"Then," continued Kane, "I remembered that although each of these windows was held down with five nails, the size of the nailheads had been different. Did you notice that?"

"Why, yes. The larger size of the nailheads was why I extracted nails from this window instead of the other. Firmer hold, you know."

Kane withdrew a nail from the small bag. It was four inches long, bent, and old.

He held the nail he'd just extracted from the other window beside it.

"It's longer," observed Sullivan. "But just as old."

"You can draw old nails out of any fence or building and reuse them. Remember what Mrs. O'Kennedy said? One library window used to be opened occasionally to air out the room. That means that one of these windows should have slid up easily—and without the nails' being extracted. An old nailhole is always larger than the old nail that fits into it if the nail has been lifted out several times when the board it was driven through was raised."

"But I tried both windows that night. Neither one would budge."

"One should have. Obviously when the window was raised to air the room in former times, the nails were left inside the frame and raised from the ledge at the same time as the window. Then, when the window was lowered again, the nails fitted back into the nailholes of the ledge. It would've ruined the window frame to renail it every time."

"You're saying that someone extracted the five nails in this window the night of the murder and replaced them with five longer nails?" said Sullivan. "Why would he bother?"

"The burglar knew that if the police realized that the window of entry could be opened easily they would suspect someone familiar with the house—someone aware that it would open easily."

He therefore wanted the window shut again, and he wanted it shut firmly in such a way that the police would never realize it could have been easily opened before. He decided to renail it. And he decided to use longer nails because the old nails would not hold it down if someone tried to lift it. The longer nails would enter fresh wood, stick solid, and the police would never suspect that they were not the nails that had been there all along."

"An interesting theory."

"More than a theory, I think."

Kane turned to the window ledge. He began cutting away at the portion that covered the hole of one of the nails Sullivan had extracted. For several minutes he cut and sliced, until at last he reached the hole itself. He cut away one side of the hole, leaving what looked like a cross-section. "There," he said when he finished. "Examine it carefully."

Sullivan did.

"What do you see?" asked Kane.

"A half section of a nailhole."

"And you see where the metal of the old nail has discolored the wood?"

"Yes. . . . Yes! For about two inches but not for the last inch."

"Precisely. After deducting the one inch of nail that was in the window, there should have been three inches of discolora-

tion in the three inch hole, but instead we have only two inches. The three inch nails that were originally there were pulled out the night of the murder and replaced by four inch nails, but the killer overlooked the fact that metals leave residue on wood when contact exists for many years. The longer nails had no time to leave a trace. Or, if Pihilly did think of it, he was unable to do anything about it and just trusted that we wouldn't catch on."

Sullivan shook his head and chuckled.

"He may have even put cloth over the heads while he was driving them in," continued Kane. "That would muffle the noise and prevent chipping through the rust into a fresh part of the nail, which would've then shone through."

"But that you can't be sure of because I damaged the heads so badly when I extracted the nails," said Sullivan.

"Right."

Kane dropped the two nails into his plastic bag.

"So it's all clear now," said Kane. "Pihilly parked beyond the hedge, walked up to this window, and lifted it. I don't know whether he pulled out the old nails before he entered the house or after he left, but I think it was after he left. That's probably why he bolted the door: so that if Mrs. Harrogate

did hear the hammering, she wouldn't be able to enter the library and discover what had happened. He may have planned this long ago and waited for a loud storm to arrive before implementing his scheme. In any case, he got in and stole the papers. But Dr. Harrogate came in, perhaps catching him in the act or perhaps not realizing that Pihilly was there. Pihilly hit him with the hammer, then took the battleaxe and used it to make sure that Harrogate was really dead. That indicates to me that Harrogate had seen him. Pihilly went out the window, nailed it down with the longer nails that were also wider and that held the window fast. Of course, Pihilly knew that this particular window could be raised easily because he had often seen it open when he worked here for the O'Kennedys."

"You keep saying Pihilly. But how do you know it was Pihilly?"

"The facts I've mentioned. That and the hammer. The hammer shows planning. I read Pihilly as a much better planner than Stritch."

"Surely there are other reasons?"

"Don't worry about insufficient evidence, sergeant. We'll nab him with the plans when he goes to Dublin. We could get a warrant and search his house, but considering Pihilly's expe-

rience and his love of intrigue, I think it's safe to assume that he's found an enormously clever place to hide those papers."

"Why would Pihilly go to Dublin?"

Kane smiled. "That's where the foreign embassies are. I spotted that part of the scheme the moment I heard about the camera and before I knew of Pihilly's involvement. Pihilly's character fitted that part of my conception of events perfectly."

Pihilly paid the taxi driver and walked toward the Soviet embassy.

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Pihilly?"

Pihilly turned and found himself facing Kane.

"Well, well. I haven't seen you in three weeks, detective chief inspector." There was sarcasm in the words.

Two sergeants walked up. "Take Mr. Pihilly down to the station," said Kane. "Search him well."

"What!"

"We have a warrant." To the sergeants: "If the papers aren't on him, search every inch of his hotel room."

The papers weren't on Pihilly.

Nor were they in his hotel room.

Kane was surprised—and embarrassed.

Then he remembered the old

Ford that Pihilly had driven up in and had it torn apart.

The papers were there.

Phelim Kane was in his office later that afternoon reviewing a gun smuggling case in Donegal when the call came in from Sergeant Brian Sullivan.

"The espionage angle was really the simplest factor of all," explained Kane. "Consider Pihilly's personality, his character,"

"You mean his love of spy fiction?"

"More than that. He was financially ambitious, yet strapped for cash. He wanted to be a professional, claimed to be a 'police consultant' instead of an informer with a criminal record. Pihilly even claimed that he had once been involved in intelligence work when in fact he had not."

"In other words," said Sullivan, "he wanted to be a cop or a spy."

"And obviously he could never become a cop. Not with a criminal record. But anyone with access to information that a foreign government considers valuable can become a spy."

"And the valuable material was the incomplete plans for a combination camera-computer to make water appear transparent in photographs? Why would the Russians care about the Loch Ness monster or Atlantis? I admit, mineral deposits would—"

"None of the above, sergeant. Such a device would be valuable for another purpose. An obvious use that Dr. Harrogate may never have thought of but that our espionage-loving friend recognized immediately."

There followed a long silence while Sullivan thought. Finally he gave up. "What was it?" he asked.

"Tracking American nuclear submarines."

UNSOLVED

by Roger Hufford

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the September issue.

The Iberia Icon outfielders always lie, and their pitcher and catcher always tell the truth. Their infielders, however, are not even considerate enough to lie all the time, but instead make statements that are alternately true and false (every other statement being false). One cannot even assume that the first statement an infielder will make will be true; it is possible for his first statement to be false and his second true.

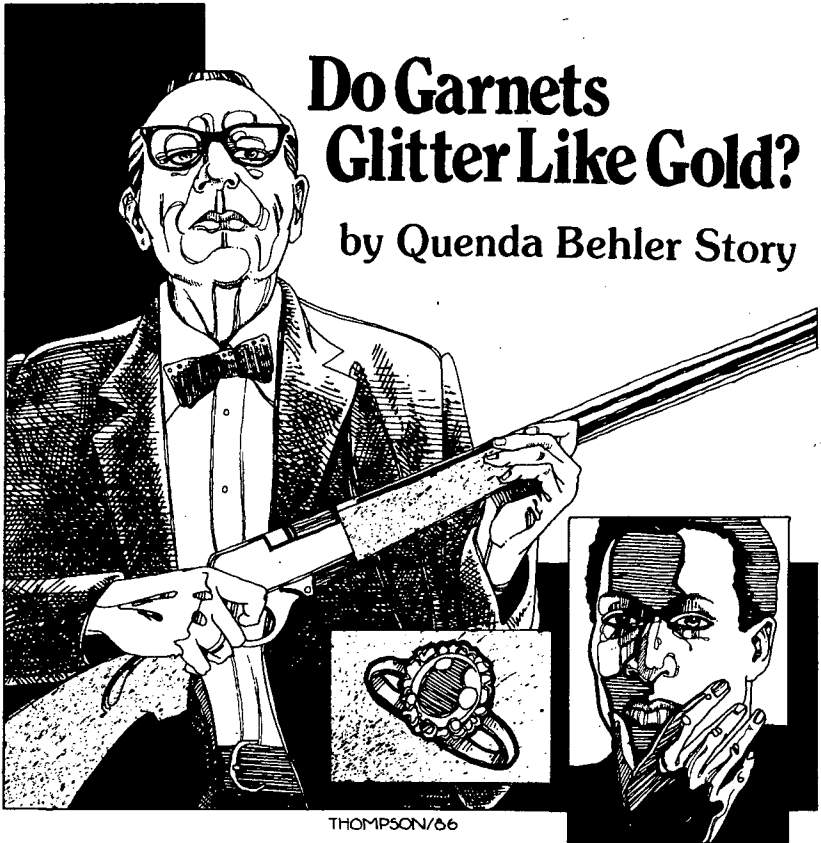
- | | |
|--------------|--|
| <i>Frank</i> | Rick is the center fielder.
Ike is the pitcher.
Jack is the right fielder. |
| <i>Hank</i> | Mike is the center fielder.
Nick is the third baseman. |
| <i>Ike</i> | Frank is the catcher.
Hank is the second baseman. |
| <i>Jack</i> | Kirk is the third baseman.
The pitcher is not always truthful. |
| <i>Kirk</i> | Nick is the catcher.
Mike is the shortstop.
Hank is the right fielder. |
| <i>Luke</i> | Rick is the shortstop.
The infielders always lie. |
| <i>Mike</i> | Kirk is the first baseman.
The shortstop never lies. |
| <i>Nick</i> | Luke is the left fielder.
Ike is the second baseman. |
| <i>Rick</i> | Jack is the left fielder.
Luke is the pitcher.
Frank is the first baseman. |

What position does each man play?

See page 135 for the solution to the July puzzle.

Do Garnets Glitter Like Gold?

by Quenda Behler Story



THOMPSON/66

Of course Roosevelt didn't believe him when Joe Terago phoned asking Roosevelt to come into work early to help with a little problem. If it'd been a "little problem," Joe wouldn't have offered to pay overtime.

Roosevelt was night manager at Joe Terago's downtown Detroit gas station and carwash. He ran the crews and the cash

register until the place closed at four in the morning. Roosevelt, tough and gut-smart, didn't run into too much he couldn't deal with, which was lucky for Joe because otherwise the profit Joe made keeping the place open after the licensed bars closed would have disappeared in a steady parade of light-fingered hookers lolling around the cash register and nervous

men with their hands in their pockets.

Joe wasn't what you'd call grateful, though. He figured Roosevelt Robert Cleeves, a high school dropout with skin as black as a ghetto alley and a face marked and scarred from a childhood fall onto a broken bottle, was lucky to have a job at all, even one that paid eight hours' minimum wage for ten hours' work like Joe's.

Roosevelt wasn't as sure that he was lucky to have Joe's job. He didn't want to go on the streets like his buddies who were now all dead or doing hard time in Jacktown, but he didn't know how much longer he could stick Joe's rotten job. When Roosevelt was a kid, there were still factories in Detroit, and there'd been men in his neighborhood with good jobs where all that mattered was how much you could lift, not how much you could read. Those jobs paid real money, too—a man could buy a car, clothes, maybe a house.

Now even a job like Joe's was hard to get.

Roosevelt shrugged on the fatigue jacket he had left over from his stint in the army. They'd said they'd teach him a trade and they did. He was gonna quit Joe's just as soon as a job as a tank driver opened up. He figured he might as well go see what Joe wanted. He

could always tell Joe to get stuffed if he didn't want to help him with his "little problem," which is what Roosevelt tried to do when he walked into Joe's office and saw the old white man sitting there in front of Joe's desk with a shotgun across his lap, its barrel pointed towards a grossly sweating Joe.

Roosevelt lifted his hand in a stiff two-fingered salute at the old man, said, "Not my business," and started backing out.

Joe jumped to his feet. "Wait a minute!" he shouted. "Just wait a minute."

The shotgun shifted around to where it covered Roosevelt, too, the deep black hole in its barrel looking like God's eye.

"You happy now?" Roosevelt snarled at Joe. "You think it won't hurt as much if he kills me, too?"

"Nobody's getting killed," Joe insisted. "You're gonna do something for me, that's all. This here gentleman had his car washed yesterday, and somebody stole a ring out of it."

Somebody had been stealing stuff from the customers for some time now, and Joe's usual response was to refer the aggrieved customer to the sign over the carwash entrance: WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST OR STOLEN PROPERTY.

The old man lifted the shotgun barrel for emphasis. "Ring is first my mother's," he said in

a thick, mid-European accent, "then my wife's. I keep it from Nazis, then Russians. When my wife die, ring is for grand-daughter when she get married. Wedding is today at three o'clock. Now you," he nodded at Roosevelt, "go get ring back from person who took it."

Roosevelt looked doubtfully at Joe, then at the shotgun. "Who was working the washers when the old man had his car washed?"

Joe nervously studied a pay sheet on his desk. "Turkey Thompson, George Brown, and that long-haired kid that plays the guitar at night in the Say-Hi Bar."

The list surprised Roosevelt. He thought he knew who was stealing from the customers and it wasn't one of those three. "Which one," he asked Joe, "was working when stuff was stolen from other customers?"

The shotgun twitched, making Joe Terago sweat even more. "I don't know," he snarled. "Who cares! Go around to where those guys live and get that ring back!"

Roosevelt studied the old man speculatively. He looked as frail and brittle as a dead leaf, but he was a little too far out of reach for Roosevelt to knock the barrel away in that half-second before action triggers reaction. Besides, the old man handled the shotgun with an ease you

didn't often see in men who lived to be old.

"That '67 Buick out back," Roosevelt asked the old man. "It yours?"

"Yes."

"Looks nice," Roosevelt murmured thoughtfully. "Those old cars, they put real paint on them. You polish'm up, they shine like diamonds." Roosevelt clenched his teeth and clicked his tongue behind them. It was a habit he didn't know he had. "An old car like that," he said, "a ring that wasn't new when Truman was president, you wouldn't think anybody would bother. What kind of a ring was it? Was it pretty?"

"Garnet," the old man said.

"Nice garnet ring."

"What's garnet look like?"

"Dark red."

"Like a ruby?"

"A little bit, darker though. There, I bring picture of it. You look at it." The old man pointed to an eight by ten photograph in a gold-tinted frame that was lying on Joe's desk. It was a picture of the old man standing next to a heavy woman who looked like she couldn't catch her breath even though she wasn't moving. She and the old man were surrounded by people toasting them with champagne glasses. Someone had circled the ring on the woman's finger with a yellow magic marker. "That was anniversary party,"

the old man said. "My wife die that summer. That is my granddaughter there beside my son, he's her father."

It was the other woman who caught Roosevelt's eye—the middle-aged woman standing on the other side of the old man, looking at him like if anything bad ever happened to him, they ought to ask her about it. "Who's this woman?" Roosevelt asked.

She hardly looked like a woman at all, with her spare, plain face and no makeup or jewelry on, and a dress Roosevelt figured she must've picked out in the dark.

"That's my daughter," the old man said. "She doesn't matter, she never got married. You go now. It will be three o'clock soon."

"If this ring's so important," Roosevelt said, "why you hauling it around in your car? Why don't you keep it at home?"

The old man seemed to shrink a little. "I need it with me," he insisted. "I keep it safe myself."

"Keep it safe!" Roosevelt snorted. "You left it in the car to get stolen!"

"I didn't know they go in car," the old man faltered. "I thought it would be safe in glove box."

Joe Terago came suddenly alive, shouting, "You senile old man! You leave a valuable ring in your car and then come in here blaming me when it turns up missing!"

They almost had him. A minute more and Joe and Roosevelt could've taken the shotgun away from him, but then he seemed to remember that he, after all, was the one with the gun and he pulled himself together. "Doesn't matter where I leave it. You got no right to take it." He gestured at Roosevelt with the barrel of the shotgun. "You go get ring."

Roosevelt shrugged and looked at Joe Terago. "Give me the keys to your van and a hundred dollars for expenses."

"A hundred dollars!" Joe exploded. "Whaddya think you're going to do with a hundred dollars of my money!"

"Okay," Roosevelt said agreeably. "A hundred probably isn't enough. You better give me two hundred."

Subsiding bitterly, Joe unlocked a drawer in his desk and took out a cashbox with a combination lock on it. He counted out two hundred dollars in cash, put the van keys on top of the pile of bills, and skidded them across his desk towards Roosevelt. "You get that ring back here," he growled. "I'm not putting that kind of money out so you can screw around."

"Don't get me mad," Roosevelt warned. "'Cause I might go home and watch TV." He scooped up the money and stuffed it into his pocket. Watching Joe's fear choke back

his rage gave Roosevelt a lift like he hadn't had in years. It was as if he and the old man were united in a secret conspiracy to teach Joe Terago about impotence. It made him laugh out loud—something he almost never did. "Don't worry about a thing," he told Joe. "Superdude is on the way."

He made a stop at Joe's store-room for some things he thought he might need and then went on out to the old man's Buick. After patting its glossy finish affectionately, he slid inside to get the registration. The old man's name was Popovich and he lived in Hamtramck, a small enclave of mid-European immigrants that had been surrounded by Detroit before Roosevelt was born. After writing the old man's address down on a piece of scrap paper, Roosevelt jumped into Joe's van and drove it to a small floral shop on the way to Hamtramck.

After all, you can't go calling on a bride without a gift.

By the time Roosevelt got to the old man's house, his euphoria had faded. He was spending a lot of Joe's time and money on something he thought he'd seen frozen in a woman's eyes. If he turned out to be wrong and Joe Terago was blasted into bloody little bits, Roosevelt Robert Cleaves would have one hell-

uva time finding another job.

Roosevelt had marked the card on one of the two bouquets he'd bought at the floral shop: "to Miss Popovich from her cousin Jersey." Roosevelt had never met anyone from Hamtramck who didn't have a cousin Jersey.

A radiant and somewhat plumpish blonde girl whom Roosevelt recognized from the photograph the old man had shown him as the old man's granddaughter opened the door. Roosevelt handed the bouquet with the card to her and said: "I hope you can help me, miss. I lost the card for this here other bouquet and all I can remember is that it was for Aunt somebody?"

She didn't hesitate. "Oh," she assured him, "that must be Aunt Rhoda." She gave him an address about a block away. Roosevelt hoped she was thinking the right aunt.

When he rang Aunt Rhoda's bell, she didn't actually open her door. She unlocked the deadbolt and peered at him through a crack in the door still secured by two safety chains. She'd looked younger in the photograph.

"Flowers, ma'am," Roosevelt said. "You have to sign the receipt." He passed a clipboard through the crack, and when she passed it back with her signature on it, he set the flowers down on her stoop by her door

and said: "You dropped something out there by your curb."

"I didn't drop anything," she said suspiciously. "What are you talking about?"

"That sack right there where I parked my van. Here, I'll get it for you." He trotted out to where the small gray sack was lying on the edge of her concrete driveway, picked up the bag and brought it back. She stared at it through the crack in her door like she expected it to explode.

"I never saw that before," she insisted.

"It must have bumped off somebody's truck. Maybe there's identification inside." Holding the bag at an angle so she could see, too, Roosevelt pulled open the drawstrings and sucked his breath in violently when the bag opened, displaying what appeared to be thousands of dollars rolled up and held tight with rubber bands. "I bet there's a reward for this," Roosevelt mumbled. "Listen," he said in a louder voice, "I'll take this and see if anybody's reported it missing." That jolted her out of the daze the sight of the money had put her into.

"You aren't taking that bag anywhere!" she ordered. "It was on my property."

"Hey, you already said it wasn't yours."

She slid the door chains open and stepped out onto her con-

crete stoop, moving so close to him she was practically touching him, and said in an angry hornet voice: "You picked that bag up on my property. If there's a reward, or if the money isn't claimed, it's mine!"

"My van is sitting on your property," Roosevelt told her. "That don't make it your van. You didn't even know that money was there till I picked it up. I got as much right to it as you."

She pushed around him so she could see his license plate. "AAR 332," she read aloud. "If you try to leave, I'll call the police."

"Hey, we don't have to fight over the money," he said. "You take half and I take half. That's fair."

"Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you! Then when somebody came looking for the money, they'd accuse me of stealing part of it."

"Sure," he snarled back, "and you want me to hand you this bag and just go away. Well, you want to talk to the cops so bad, you go ahead and call 'em. Tell them I found this money and I'm not giving it up without some protection."

"Protection?" she echoed.

"Yeah, if there's a reward or something, I got some of it coming, and I'm not gonna let this money out of my hands until I got something to protect my rights in it. Like at a bank.

They don't give you money unless you give them collateral."

"What do you mean, collateral?"

"You know, the way a bank does, so that if you try to cheat me out of my share, I got something to settle the debt with."

Her eyes narrowed contemptuously. "You mean like at a pawnshop."

"Sort of like that," he conceded.

She thought about it for a moment, rubbing her mouth thoughtfully with her work-roughened fingers. "I have an idea," she murmured. She started back into the house but stopped at the threshold and looked hard at him. "Don't you leave here," she warned. "I've got your license number."

When he made an appeasing gesture with his hands, she went on into the house, slamming the door behind her. It didn't take her long to reappear with something clutched in her fist. "Here," she said, thrusting it at him aggressively, "you can keep this until we get the reward," but when he reached to take it, she pulled her hand back. "Give me the money first," she commanded.

"You didn't even show me what you got," he protested.

She reluctantly opened her hand, letting the sun fire up a deep red gleam in her palm.

"It's been in my family for over a hundred years," she said, picking the ring up and holding it between her thumb and forefinger like she was selling it to him, which in a way she was. He hesitated, not sure what to do now. He wasn't going to knock her down and grab it. He wouldn't risk a mugging charge for Joe Terago's benefit. Luckily his uncertainty seemed to be what she needed. She seized the bag and pushed the ring determinedly into his hand.

When he had it, he relaxed and spun the ring triumphantly into the air like a coin. "You keep the bag, lady. I don't mind. It's all Joe Terago's money, and besides, there's less than two hundred dollars in real money in there anyway."

She gaped at him incredulously.

"Go on," he urged. "Open the bag and look. Pull the money out."

She took one of the fat rolls of bills and pulled off the rubber band. Only the ten dollar bill on top was real. The rest was pieces of paper cut to dollar size.

"It's whatcha call a Detroit bankroll," he grinned. "All flash and no cash."

"This is a con game," she breathed.

"The old pigeon drop," he agreed. "Nothing works like greed for cheating people."

"You needn't think you're getting away with this because I'm calling the police right now!" She slipped anger on like an old bathrobe, obviously the emotion she felt most comfortable with.

"Go ahead and call. They can take the ring right over to Joe's office and give it to your father. Once he knows it was you stole it, he'll take the gun off Joe."

Her face stiffened into rigid lines. "Who's Joe?" she demanded.

"Joe Terago. He owns the carwash where your father took his car yesterday. Your father thinks that's where his ring was ripped off, so he says if he doesn't get the ring back before his granddaughter's wedding at three, he's blowing Joe away."

"He will, too," she said bitterly. "He doesn't care about anything except what he wants."

"You can't say too much about him," Roosevelt said pointedly. "You stole his ring."

"It's my ring!" she shouted at him. "My mother wanted me to have it, but she was too afraid of him to give it to me." Rhoda Popovich's face softened a little. "I don't care if my niece has the ring, but I should be the one to give it to her." Her face tightened up again. "Go on, take it. I don't want anybody hurt because of that crazy old man."

She made Roosevelt feel guilty

for having admired the old man's guts. But he didn't need her permission to take the ring, not with it already in his hands. He started to leave but stopped when he heard her question.

"How did you know I had it?"

"I was pretty sure that the guys working when your father got his car washed weren't the ones stealing from the customers," he said. "Besides, it seemed like your father was awful anxious that it was somebody from the carwash that took his ring. When I asked him why he didn't keep the ring at home, he about fell apart. Then I saw that anniversary picture." Roosevelt was quiet for a moment, trying to think how to tell her that the way she looked, the bitterness in her face, made her conspicuous. "Anyway," he shrugged, "you didn't look like a woman who'd have much jewelry, so I figured if I could get you to bring out what you did have, the ring would probably be there—if you had it at all." He smiled. "I didn't mind taking a chance on it. I could live with Joe being shredded by a shotgun."

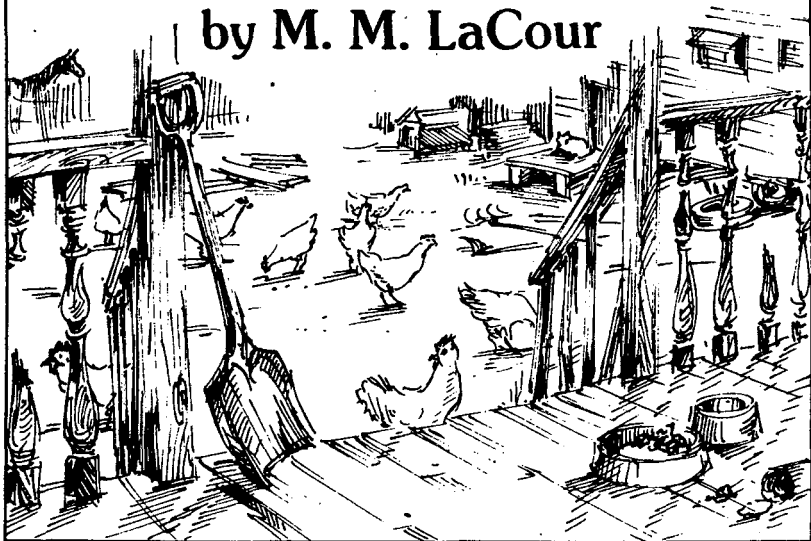
"Will you tell my father where you found the ring?"

Roosevelt started down her steps. "Not me," he assured her. "I don't ever tell people with guns things they don't want to hear."

FICTION

The Case of the Lost Collie

by M. M. LaCour



“Make you a deal? You take him in this time, and I’ll take him in next time?”

“Make *you* a deal! You take him in this time and I’ll clean the bathroom, which you’ve promised to do now for four days!”

Elly was being unnecessarily hard to deal with and outrageously unfair.

“If you take him in, I’ll do the bathroom when we get back and scrub the kitchen floor.”

“You take him in, Hec, and

I’ll do the bathroom, the kitchen floor, and change the oil in the car, which you promised to do last week.”

I took a swallow of tea and gave Daug a dirty look over the top of my mug. “Will you vacuum, too?” What the heck, it was worth a shot.

“Hec!”

“All right, all right,” I gave in graciously. “I’ll take the ornery lump in to see the vet, but next time, Elly, it’s your turn.”

I swear to God, Daug looked like he was smiling.

Elly was smiling for sure.

"Lest you forget, Hec, it was my turn the last three times. Anyway, after this trip, he'll only have to go in once a year for shots."

I sighed and looked out the picture window, sourly contemplating my defeat. Naturally, it was raining. I'd get soaked; Daug would get soaked. Sometimes life was just not fair. But I'd do it, to please Elly. I'd take her dumb dog to the vet to get his shots.

Elly poured us both a fresh cup and added, "I'll ride in with you, but you'll have to take him into the examining room. After all, Hec, he *is* your dog."

On the way over, while Daug slobbered all over my rear seat, Elly speculated about why Daug always tried to eat Doc Melbourne on sight.

"Sometimes I think dogs just don't like certain people. You know how he barks at the UPS deliveryman. Do you think it's something they smell?"

"Last time we were there, Melbourne smelled all right to me."

Elly giggled. I love it when she giggles, just like a little girl. She'll be sixty-five come July, but she'll never lose that giggle, thank God. Of course she could afford to giggle; she wasn't going to be the one who'd have to hold down a hundred

pounds of unmanageable animal while Melbourne tried to give Daug a shot.

"I know why he hates the vet," I said knowingly. "Do you remember the first thing Melbourne did when we brought Daug here the first time?"

"No, what?"

"Stuck that thermometer you know where."

"Oh my, you are a smart dog, aren't you!" she praised while shaking Daug's paw. "Now, let me see your teeth, that's a good dog, nice and clean. I can see your owners take good care of you." She handed him another piece of cheese. "I don't think we need to take your temperature, you look pretty darn healthy to me. Just one more little bitty thing we have to do, and that's give you a shot. Now, it's not going to hurt . . ." Before I could blink she'd whisked the needle in and out. "There, that wasn't too bad, was it." Then more cheese.

Daug was in heaven. I was in shock. Elly was standing in the examining room door smiling.

"I just can't believe it," I stammered. "He didn't growl once, he even got on the table for you. . . ."

She patted Daug on the head and smiled at me. "Doc told me how difficult Daug has been,

just thought I'd try a new approach. This is a nice looking dog. Is he papered?"

"No, he goes outside," I answered stupidly.

From Elly came, "He was a stray, but he does look full-blooded."

With a charming toss of the head, Lee Cronkite laughed. "That's what I meant, is he a full-blooded German shepherd? Going outside does help, though!"

I liked her. Quite a change from crotchety old Melbourne. I guessed her to be in her late twenties, early thirties. She reminded me a little of Elly's niece back in Chicago. Both were petite and perky, and both wore their hair in a short straight bob that framed round, scrubbed looking faces. Our new vet, though, was definitely cuter than Kate. Kate was on Elly's side of the family.

From the reception area came a plaintive, "Oh no! Not again!"

Before I could grab him, Daug shot off the table and past us into the waiting room.

"Not a cat!" I exclaimed, on the run after him.

It wasn't a cat but the most bedraggled, dirty, down and out looking collie I'd ever seen in my life.

"I could kill that man!" said Lee angrily from beside me. "I could just kill him!"

"Twenty-five years on the Chicago police force, and now look what I'm reduced to! Delivering filthy, lost hounddogs back home." I wasn't really mad; the skies had cleared and I enjoy driving around the back roads of Cedar Bend, exploring. That is, when I don't have to go down too many bumpy gravel roads.

"Look, Hec, a deer!" Elly exclaimed with delight.

Daug saw it, too, and let out with a bark right in my left ear. I looked in my rear view mirror. The runaway collie was content to lie stretched out across my rear seat. Fortunately, Lee had thoughtfully provided a blanket. The collie was probably the dirtiest dog I'd ever come across, even among the scavenging packs that occasionally wandered Chicago's back alleys.

"You'd think we were the humane society or something," I continued to grumble.

"Watch out for that hole in the road, Hec, and you know, dear, we didn't have anything else planned for this morning. Lee couldn't help it if Dr. Melbourne was out on a call."

"This is an awfully long way for that mutt to have come."

We'd already gone several miles southeast of town off Edgewick Road, out into what

I called the super boonies. Could I have missed a turn? The towering evergreens were no help. They told no tales, closed-mouthed as they were, keeping their secrets to themselves about who lived where, up what gravel road, at what unmarked fork.

"There's the mailbox, and there's the big cedar," I proclaimed with relief. "Must be that road to the right."

"There's another big cedar up farther, Hec."

"Elly, this is a forest."

"I guess it must be the place, but . . ."

I had started up the most god-awful excuse for a road I'd yet had the pleasure of driving in the fair state of Washington. The recent rains had made the potholes muddy land mines. "No wonder you're so filthy," I said to the collie. Talking to animals is a disgusting habit I'd picked up from Elly.

That's when the shot whistled past my window.

Elly shouted, "What was that?"

"Get down!" I commanded, slamming on the brakes. Daug was barking his fool head off, and so was the collie. "Shut up!" I yelled at them both, and surprisingly they did.

Instinctively I reached for the area on my side where I'd carried a .38 for over twenty-five years. Nothing.

Then the second shot whistled over the top of our little Honda.

There we were, sitting ducks, with me retired and unarmed.

"Turn that heap around and get the hell out of here!" demanded a not-at-all-friendly male voice. It seemed to boom out menacingly from all directions.

In retrospect I must say Daug was fearless as he answered with an equally menacing, deep-throated growl.

As I ran my hand under the front seat, searching for the tire iron, I whispered, "Stay down" to Elly and tried to figure out what the heck was going on.

"This here's private property. Turn around." I didn't like the edge of craziness in that voice.

"Hec, I'm scared."

"So am I."

Loudspeakers, I realized. Well, two could play at that game. Sliding over, keeping my head down, I stretched to reach under the rear seat and grab Tom's Christmas present to me, a bull horn. The Christmas before he'd given me a CB. It was a tricky maneuver and the collie didn't help matters by licking me in the face.

I managed to slide the bull horn out and up into the front seat with me. Then I grabbed the CB mike and tried to raise Clara. "Clara," I whispered into

the mike. "Clara, this is Hector Hoggs. Get me Tom, right away. This is an emergency. Over."

No response.

I cursed.

"Clara," I tried again. "This is Chief Hoggs, Elly and I are out off Edgewick Road at Jack Simpson's place, and we're being shot at. Tell Tom to get the heck out here, and fast. Over."

Nothing. We were on our own.

I'd have to go for it. There's no way you can stay down in the front seat of a Honda and talk into a bull horn at the same time when you're five ten and nearly a hundred and sixty pounds, with a lot of that poundage gravitating in the gut area.

The loudspeakers blared again, "You've got twenty seconds before I turn that sardine can into spaghetti!"

Lowering the window, I raised my head, stuck the bull horn outside, and started talking all at the same time. "This is Chief Hector Hoggs." Didn't think it was necessary to mention that I was retired. "And I'm here on official business, Mr. Simpson. If you don't drop that gun and come out here right now, I'm going to have to put you under arrest." I didn't have the power to arrest anyone any more, but it was definitely worth a try.

I'd never heard a laugh like

that. Maybe it was my imagination, but I sure thought the whole county quaked a little in response. Daug howled and the collie whimpered.

"You sure got nerve, give you that! Ain't blind, you know, you're that ole coot moved to town a couple of years back from Chicago. 'Case you ain't noticed, this ain't no Chicago."

So much for that bright idea.

"And don't you go calling me no Mr. Simpson, neither. Next time I gets me hands on that skunk, he's a dead man. Now turn that heap around and head out! Simpson's still on up the road a piece, and the only reason I'm a telling you that is you got that sweet li'l wife of yours in the car with you. Now get the hell off my property, and if you see that half-brained Scooter, tell him to stop stealing logs off my property!"

"Hec," Elly gasped, "I know who that is!"

At that moment I didn't care who it was. I just started the motor and backed out.

I guess if you concentrated on the pieces, like the pond doing what ponds do in the morning sun, the trees looking like trees do after having survived the rain and ending up in warmth, and Rattlesnake Ridge just standing there looking formidable, it was okay.

Add to that, though, a dilapidated trailer from the fifties, twenty-five or so mangy chickens, a collapsing corral that was barely able to contain two not too healthy looking horses, more rusting junk than you'd find in a commercial junkyard, and rotting timber odds and ends all over the place, you had the whole scene.

Elly actually seemed enthusiastic. "Oh, Hec, isn't this interesting!"

"Wait, Elly, don't get out yet. So far the natives haven't been that friendly." I didn't tell Elly, but as soon as we'd dropped that mutt off with the Simpson character, I planned to bring Tom back out with me and charge Simpson's shooting neighbor with assault.

She dropped her hand from the door handle. "You don't think . . ."

"Let me look around first."

"Be careful."

"Doesn't seem to be anyone around, Elly, except for all these animals." I let Daug and the collie out. Daug went straight for the chickens and the collie sat down by the car, apparently not greatly overjoyed about being home. "I think it's okay, you can come on out. I guess we should go knock on the door."

A single huge ginger cat lounged on the trailer's front

porch, which was a piece of plywood sitting on two bricks. It seemed untroubled that some strange dog had set off chickens scurrying all over the place.

"Daug," I commanded irritably, "get over here and sit down." He obeyed, for once.

Undaunted, Elly marched right up to the door, giving the cat a kind word in passing, and knocked. "Yo-ho! Mr. Simpson!"

Nothing.

With a harder knock she tried again. "Mr. Simpson, we brought your dog back."

Still nothing.

"Maybe he's out back?" she cheerfully offered. Sometimes Elly's sense of adventure surprises me. Here we'd just been shot at on some stranger's property and were trying to deliver an obviously unwanted dog on some other stranger's property, and she was acting like it was fun.

"Elly, wait. . . ." Too late. Disgruntled, I followed her around as she wandered. Of course she had to stop and pat the horses and talk chicken talk to a few brave birds.

"These animals certainly aren't well taken care of, Hec. Now I see why Lee doesn't like Mr. Simpson. Oh, Hec, look at that old tractor!"

Sometimes I get irritable, like when I haven't had breakfast,

have to take Daug to the vet, have to deliver runaway dogs, and get shot at.

"Elly, would you please forget the tractor. If you don't mind, could we please leave this mutt and go home. I would like to have breakfast before lunchtime."

"Now, Hec, you don't have to get crabby. It's just that Lee said Mr. Simpson is always here. Remember, she did say he was sort of a hermit?"

I remembered. "I guess you're right. We should look around a little."

"It's just like the one Grandma Jenkins used to have up in her orchard in Michigan! We kids used to love playing down there. And did it ever keep the apples crisp!" She was talking about the root cellar we'd found on the back side of the trailer.

"God, doesn't this man ever cut back the raspberries!" I grumbled, extricating myself from a killer vine.

"I wonder what Mr. Simpson keeps in his." Fearlessly, she was trampling through the bushes, headed straight for the two flat wooden doors of the root cellar.

"Elly! Will you please stop. This is private property. It's none of our business what Mr. Simpson keeps in his root cellar."

Hungry as I'd been, I decided to pass on breakfast. Wendell drove Elly home in my Honda.

"Hec," Tom addressed me as he returned from his police jeep, "I've put a call in to Clara to get the guys out here. I don't think Jack got himself locked in there by accident, you know."

"Neither do I." A few years back I'd stopped smoking, for Elly's sake, but I sure wanted one then. "You still haven't told me how you knew we were here."

"Your call to Clara."

"Clara never answered my call."

"She can't answer if you're on the wrong channel, Hec. You just lucked out that she was monitoring the emergency channel when you got on the air."

"I was on the wrong channel?"

"Yep."

"Elly's never seen anything like this before, you know."

The kid was looking a little ghastly himself. "To be honest with you, Hec, neither have I." Then, more like himself, "Course I haven't been around as long as some people I know."

"At least you know what channel the police band is," I returned sourly.

"Come on, Hec, don't be so hard on yourself. You know, for

a man of your age you do all right."

I turned in time to see that good-natured grin plastered across that baby face, and I had to smile. Then, more in the way of our usual banter, "I think you're going to need some help on this one, kid. Somebody hit Simpson on the head and stuck that stick in the latch to make sure he couldn't get out. And ~~given your lack of age and experience~~ and all that, you might need some assistance from a wiser, more experienced gentleman."

"Just might. Want to come along with me to pay Holcombe a visit?"

"Nothin' would suit me better. I never did like being shot at; like it even less now."

"The right of private property is sacred to me, now you know that, Tom," pontificated Ty Holcombe over the top of a glass of sherry. "Pretty good stuff, huh, fellas?" he added with a lift of his crystal glass. "One thing I ain't got is education, but taste, now I know what's good, and this stuff's good."

He was right, it was good. So was everything else I'd seen so far. Top of the line, good quality, from the furniture to the Oriental rugs, from the crystal we were sipping the best sherry

I'd ever tasted from to the electronic gadgetry visible everywhere. Loudspeakers had only been the tip of the iceberg.

"Private property's one thing." I was still hot about my Elly being shot at. "But shooting at innocent people is illegal, Mr. Holcombe."

He dropped his head and actually tried to look embarrassed. But I caught the fleeting twinkle in the scoundrel's eye as he said, "Shucks, Hec, I can call you Hec, can't I? Call me Ty. Tom can tell you, I wasn't really trying to hit you, just don't like nobody messing around my property. And you believe you me, Hec, if I'da known you had Elly with you, shoot, I woulda just used the speakers."

I bet. "Well, you nearly scared Elly half to death."

All around us the strains of Vivaldi could be heard. Don't know diddly about classical music, but I recognized the *Four Seasons* because it was Elly's favorite. I couldn't see the speakers, but I guessed them to be in every room in the house.

From Tom, "Chief Hoggs is right, Ty. You know this isn't the first time I've had a complaint. You just can't go around shooting at people."

"All right, all right!" He raised his hands in jovial surrender. "Cross my heart, Tom, won't do

no more shooting till I find out who it is. Good enough?"

Tom looked to me.

Despite it all, I liked the man. There was something about him that reminded me of a big panda bear. He had piercing deep brown eyes set back in huge sockets framed with bushy eyebrows that almost went from end to end of his forehead. His chin was covered with a huge brown beard turning to grey, and his head was as bald as a crystal ball.

But I still remembered that crazed laugh and shots whizzing by my head. "Well . . . you know, Mr. Holcombe, you weren't as congenial an hour ago as you are now."

"I can come off pretty ornery, can't I?" he bellowed unself-consciously. "All an act, Hec, gotta keep my privacy, you know."

I took another sip of sherry; it *was* excellent. "You know Elly?"

"Who doesn't know Elly Hogs!"

Tom shot me a wink. Smart-aleck kid.

Holcombe continued, "Sweetest li'l thing God ever sat on this green earth. Never forget that Christmas party she got going for the old folks in town, now that was some bash!"

"Then that food drive she organized, helped a lotta folks in

this river valley with that. Yep, that wife of yours is pretty well thought of out here. You are gonna tell her how sorry I am 'bout this morning?"

Grudgingly I nodded.

Tom cleared his throat. "Mr. Holcombe . . ."

"What's with the Mr. Holcombe stuff, Tommy boy? Hell, known you since you were just a twinkle in your rascally father's eye. Now . . ."

"Mr. Holcombe," Tom insisted sternly, "Jack Simpson is dead and we want to ask you a few questions."

“ ‘B out time somebody put that no good excuse for a human being where he belongs. Feel sorry for Scooter, though.” There was no surprise in Holcombe’s voice, no sorrow, and no apology for saying what he felt.

I sat back and shut up. This was the kid’s job, not mine. Being a cop as long as I had, you came across a lot of different types of characters, but as unique as we all like to think we are, you start seeing types after a while, not identical but the similarities begin to stand out more than the differences.

When I was at the 12th Precinct I worked with a captain who claimed he’d logged every

type of personality that existed. Two hundred and ten, if I remember right. Captain Novakowski had never been to Cedar Bend.

"I gather, then, there was no love lost between you and Mr. Simpson?" Tom continued smoothly.

"Ha! Jack Simpson was the lowest type of varmint to walk the face of this earth. You know that, Tom. Bet you a dime to a dollar you won't find nobody in this here valley with a good word to say 'bout Simpson."

"Somebody bashed him in the head, threw him in his own root cellar, and stuck a stick through the latch so he couldn't get out. That, Mr. Holcombe, is a little more serious than not having a good word to say about a man. That's murder."

The light strains of *Spring* pleasantly filled the silence as we sipped sherry and thought our own thoughts.

Then with the suddenness of a cobra strike Holcombe asked me, "Want to buy a newspaper, Hec?"

"Clara," Tom said into his CB mike, "This is Sheriff Rhodes. Did Wendell call in yet? Over."

"Is that you, sheriff?" responded the most awful, high-pitched, nasal whine the hu-

man voice is capable of producing.

Tom slowly counted to six before switching the mike back on. "Yes, Clara, it's the sheriff. When I get on the radio and say this is Sheriff Rhodes, it means, Clara, that it's Sheriff Rhodes."

"Well, you don't have to get snippy, now do you? Sheriff Tim never got snippy." The woman's voice was like fingernails on a blackboard. Clara was good at her job, but lousy as a warm, loving, human being. "As you know, Sheriff Rhodes, it says right in the rulebook, make sure you identify who you're talking to."

I had a smart-aleck remark in the offing, but seeing the look on Tom's face I decided to keep my mouth shut.

"What it doesn't say in the rulebook, Clara," Tom responded, smooth as glass, "is that Sheriff Tim has retired and no longer pays your salary."

"Wendell dropped Mrs. Hoggs at home, then went back to where that no-good coot Simpson finally got what was comin' to him." End of transmission.

"Simpson certainly was well liked," I mused out loud.

We were headed, I hoped, back to my house in Tom's new police jeep. Fifteen grand of the taxpayer's money, and it was the best. Top of the line CB, gun

rack, leather upholstery, and springs that made you forget you were going fifty mph down a gravel ditch called a road.

It was nearing lunchtime, my hunger was returning, and I was getting a little peevish. "Could you please slow down!"

"I thought you were hungry."

"I would also like to be alive to eat my lunch."

"Am I invited?" Never known the kid to miss a free feed from Elly.

"Are you kidding? If Elly sees you pull up, there's no way you'll get away until she's stuffed you to the gills."

"I was counting on that."

It was almost eleven A.M., the sun was still out, and I tried to relax and enjoy the scenery. It'd taken a while, but I was getting used to trees instead of tenements and watching for deer running in front of your car instead of kids. "Who is this Scooter, anyway?"

"Scooter Simpson, Jack's nephew."

"He live out there? Elly and I sure didn't see any sign of life other than animal type." I took a hefty breath, letting the air out slowly, and leaned back in my seat. A lot had happened that morning. I needed time to digest it all.

Tom sighed wearily. "I don't like the sound of Scooter's not being around, Hec." Then,

shaking his head for emphasis, "Don't like the sound of that one bit."

"You know this Scooter?"

"Everybody knows Scooter."

I didn't and said so.

Narrowly skirting a pothole the size of a Jacuzzi, he wisecracked off, "If you'd get out more, like Elly does . . ."

"Are you or are you not going to tell me who Scooter is?"

When he didn't answer immediately, I turned to see his face had clouded over. Then, picking his words carefully, "Like I said, Scooter's Jack's nephew. If I remember right, Scooter is around twenty or twenty-one by now. He's, well he's . . . I'm not sure what the right word is these days, but he's what I'd call retarded. Been that way all his life."

Somberly, matching his mood, I asked, "And you think Scooter killed his uncle?"

Another, heavier sigh. "With the way that jerk treated him, wouldn't blame him one bit." Then, more to himself, "Poor kid."

Everyone who had known Jack Simpson had hated him. Real lovable guy. "What's so terrible about this Simpson that I haven't heard a kind word spoken about him-yet?"

With a short, derisive laugh, Tom started counting on his fingers. "To start off with . . ."

"Would you please keep your hands on the wheel."

"... the stingiest person I've ever known. Hated to pay for anything, and it wasn't because he didn't have any money, don't let that shack fool you. What got me most, though, was the way he treated Scooter. Hell, the kid's parents died when he was five; his mother was Jack's own sister. Only did enough for the kid to keep the state from coming and taking him away. Kept Scooter stuck out there in the sticks with him, doing all the work around that place. Never gave him a dime to spend, never tried to get him in any special classes, nothin'." Tom virtually spat those last words out.

"What about Lee? She didn't seem to be that fond of Simpson either."

I certainly didn't expect what happened next. The kid actually turned bright red. "You mean Lee the vet?"

"Yes, I mean Lee the vet. I told you that's how we ended up out there anyway."

Interesting turn of events, I thought. The kid's smitten.

"You saw those animals, man barely fed them. Humane society's been out there a couple of times, checking on the horses."

"What'll happen to them now?"

With a self-satisfied smile he

informed me that he'd already instructed Wendell to make arrangements for the animals.

"By arrangements, you mean new homes, not . . ."

"Hec!" he admonished.

"Just checking."

We were back on the main road; lunch was near. The sun was actually warm on my face as it beat down through the window. Not a summer sun yet but in a few months . . . "And," I abruptly broke our comfortable silence, "what did Holcombe mean about did I want to buy a newspaper? Is everyone in this valley as loony as Simpson and Holcombe?"

"Holcombe isn't loony, not by a long shot. One of the most successful businessmen in this area, at least he was. Nowadays he just sits around counting his money. You saw that house."

I was incredulous. "You mean he really does want to sell me a newspaper?"

"Sure sounded like it to me. Probably talking about the *Beacon*, not really a newspaper yet, more like a flyer. So far it's been coming out biweekly."

"Never heard anything more ridiculous, me running a newspaper."

Finally we were leaving Interstate 90, heading down Cedar Bend Road. Home was nearing. "What arrangements did you make about the collie?"

Elly would want to know.

"You mean the collie that was sitting in the back seat of your Honda?"

"No, he was out by the time you got there. The dirty, smelly one, the one we were delivering back for Lee."

"Like I said, you mean the one that was sitting in the back of your Honda when Wendell left to take Elly home?"

Lunch was delicious, as usual.

Wendell called just as we finished eating to inform Tom that Scooter had been picked up in Pierce County trying to hitch a ride. Lee had called Elly shortly afterwards to ask how the collie was. She also asked if Tom was there. She didn't ask to speak to him, though.

By the time Elly had packed Tom off with a bag full of half the chocolate chip cookies she'd baked the day before for *me*, I was exhausted and said so.

"A nap, now?" Elly protested sweetly. "Who's going to give the collie a bath, then? I can't bring her in the house in the condition she's in."

Sometimes a man has to put his foot down. "Elly," I said firmly, "we are not going to keep that collie. One dog is enough!"

Needless to say, I spent what was left of the afternoon bathing the collie, making her a cedar chip bed just like Daug's,

and going into town to buy her a collar, a leash, and matching doggie bowls.

I'd seen those eyes before, questioning but not sure of the question or answer; unconsciously friendly and desiring to please but wary; hopeful but sure of disaster to come. And what did we do at the 12th when yet another set of those eyes presented themselves? We'd hustle them off to County, that's what we'd do. They had a special ward for those kinds of eyes. Out of sight in special wards, though, doesn't make you forget, no matter how hard you want to. I think there's a uniquely reserved place in your brain where you try to lock that stuff up. Most of the time that door stays closed, nice and tight, until . . .

"Nobody's going to hurt you, Scooter," Tom gently reassured those eyes. "I know you must be scared, but honest, we just want to talk to you, ask you a few questions. Is that all right with you?"

I like to tease Tom, call him the child-sheriff, wet behind the ears stuff, but the kid was all right.

The eyes grew less apprehensive. "You wanna ask Scooter questions?" You couldn't miss the wonder and amazement in his voice. Why would anybody

think Scooter could answer anything about anything?

We were in Tom's cubbyhole of an office, not that great but better than interrogating him in a cell. Dressed in what Elly would have pronounced rags, his hair in a crewcut, his round, flat face smudged and dirty, Scooter sat stiffly on the edge of a wooden, slat-backed chair, anxiously turning those eyes back and forth between Tom, Wendell, and me.

"Just a few questions, Scooter," Tom patiently went on. "Okay?"

"Okay!" Scooter piped out with glee. "Scooter can answer questions!" Those eyes had begun to twinkle with delight.

"Why were you running away, Scooter?" Tom asked, pointedly but not harshly.

Scooter smiled joyfully. It was a question he could answer. "Scooter hates Uncle Jack. Scooter'll never see him again. Scooter's gonna get a job!"

Sympathetically Tom nodded encouragement. "Uncle Jack wasn't too nice, was he?"

"Scooter hated Uncle Jack! Never see Uncle Jack again."

"Don't you think Uncle Jack'll come looking for you, Scooter?"

With a broad smile, Scooter shook his head knowingly. "Uh-uh! Uncle Jack never come after Scooter again!"

There are moments that hang

in time, pieces of life that are indelibly engraved on your brain. That was one of them.

The next words out of Tom seemed to come in slow motion, as if they knew the outcome and were in no hurry to get there. "Why won't Uncle Jack ever come after Scooter again?"

"'Cause he's in the root cellar!" Then he began to sing softly to himself, "Scooter put Uncle Jack in the root cellar. Scooter put Uncle Jack in the root cellar, shame on Scooter, shame on Scooter!"

“You know, Hec, she's really a very smart dog." Elly continued to be undaunted by the nasty mood I was in.

"Good."

"And she and Daug seem to really like each other."

"Good."

I was in my favorite chair that looks out onto the river and the south face of Mount Si. It was another sunny morning, but as far as I was concerned it could just as well have been raining and overcast.

Elly, comfortably curled up on the couch, was crocheting a sweater, by the size of it, presumably for me. I hadn't gotten up enough nerve yet to tell her that I would never wear a sweater of that shade of yellow.

"I know what you're brooding about, Hec. But things really didn't turn out that bad for Scooter."

"Scooter didn't kill Jack Simpson."

"But nobody's blaming him, Hec. Tom's got him all settled in that nice animal preserve place with a job as a helper taking care of the animals and his own little trailer. And those people who run the place seemed awfully nice. It was like they really care about him. You don't need to feel sorry for Scooter."

"But he didn't kill Simpson. Maybe he did give the old man a hit on the head and push him in that root cellar, but the autopsy report said Simpson had only been stunned by that blow and ended up with a broken ankle. What he actually died of was hypothermia. What killed Simpson was that stick's being stuck in the clasp. Somebody knew Simpson was lying helplessly in that root cellar and took advantage of the situation to make sure he never saw the light of day again. And I don't care what the authorities believe. Scooter didn't do that. Scooter is not smart enough to have even thought to make that root cellar a coffin. Shame on Scooter all right, but shame on somebody else, too."

Probably thoroughly exasperated with me, Elly sighed.

"I know you don't think he's guilty, that's what you told Tom and me over and over last night. But, Hec, if he didn't, who did? And, sweetheart, what difference does it make now?"

"It makes a difference to me," I stated flatly. "And I don't know who did it. Don't you understand, Elly, I don't know who did it, and that makes me thoroughly P.O.'d."

"You don't think it was Lee, do you? She's such a nice young girl, and I think she and Tom just might . . ."

"She hated his guts. And why did she ask us to take an animal back to the person whom she knew mistreated it? I know she said because the only other choice was to take it to the shelter and they'd probably put the mutt to sleep. I guess I believe her. No, I do believe her. I don't think Lee killed Simpson."

"Holcombe?" she threw out, not missing a stitch.

"Hated Simpson, too. Crazy enough to think he could get away with it. But I don't think the method fits the man. If I read Holcombe right, he would have just blown Simpson away if he felt like it. Thing is, Elly, anyone who knew Simpson hated him. Makes for a lot of suspects."

"Are you going to buy the *Beacon*?"

"Are you kidding?"

Elly decided she wanted to grow cauliflower, brussels sprouts, and broccoli that spring. All the things I didn't eat. And wouldn't a cold frame be just the thing to get them started?

That's how I happened to be out in our front yard that morning trying to make the prefab, precut, easy-to-assemble job I'd bought go together.

Par for the course, nothing fit, and after two hours I'd managed one half of a frame that, according to the manufacturers, would take a two-year-old fifteen minutes to assemble. I decided to take a break before I burned the whole thing up.

A break for me means playtime for Daug. He brought me his ball, and I threw it. Elly had been right, the collie, which we hadn't named yet, was pretty smart. On seeing what was going on, she found a stick and brought it to me. I threw it in the water, and she was after it like a shot.

Between throws for those two mutts I tried to take my mind off Elly's unfinished cold frame and enjoy the spring morning. It was definitely okay, having retired in Washington, that is.

A little dull, but okay. Was buying a newspaper what I needed? What the heck did I know about running a newspaper? Diddly, that's what.

Then Daug dropped a rock in my lap, fortunately for me between my legs. "No rocks!" I demanded. "You hardly have any teeth left now." He sulked off.

Finally I went back to the cold frame, and after an eternity more of cursing, it was standing. All I needed to do was add the latch. Latches I'd had experience with and finished that up without a hitch.

"Elly!" I called proudly toward the house. "Elly, come on out and see your cold frame." Not half bad, I said to myself.

Her reaction when she got out there was worth waiting for.

"Hec, it's fantastic!"

I put my arm around her and we sat down on the grass and admired my handiwork.

Elly was all smiles. I liked that. It almost made up for the fact that cauliflower loomed in my future.

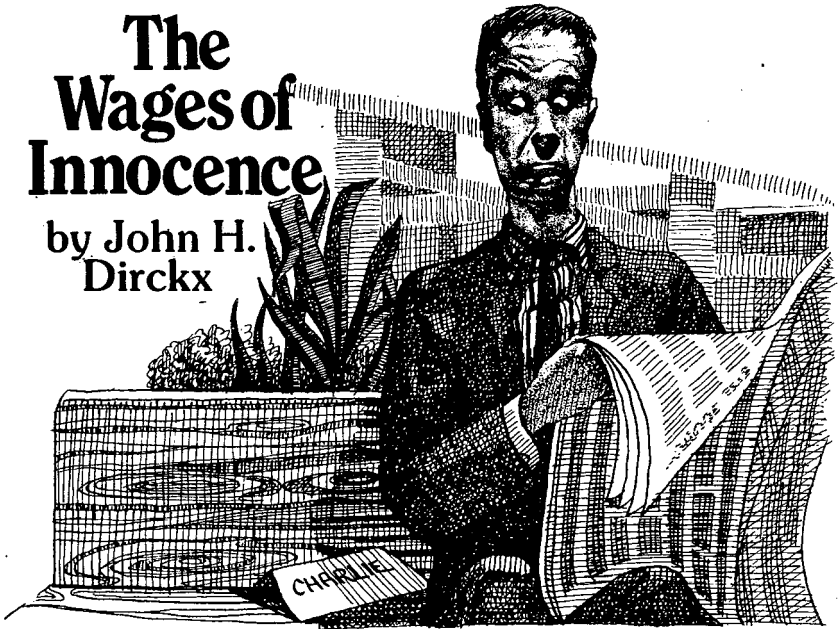
Daug was back with the ball; Elly threw it for him. I looked around for the collie, expecting that a stick would be next.

A stick *was* next, she had it in her gracefully pointing snout.

But instead of bringing it over to Elly or me, she pranced as proudly as could be over to Elly's new cold frame and stuck the stick, neat as a pin, through its latch.

The Wages of Innocence

by John H. Dirckx



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One day in May, Charles Vine finished off the Smiths before lunch. This unprecedented achievement seemed to call for some kind of celebration, so he followed his customary Thursday lunch at the Nesbit House with a most uncustomary glass of liqueur.

At thirty-four, Charles Vine had sunk into about as deep a rut as it is possible to be in and still move forward from day to day. His bachelor existence was regulated entirely by clocks, calendars, and the demands of his employer, with no allow-

ance for the operation of whimsy or sentiment. He went in dread of the inconvenient and the unexpected, took vitamins daily, wore overshoes in wet weather, and seldom spoke to strangers without strong provocation. He didn't own a car. The singles apartment building where he lived had armed security guards.

Vine carried his integrity around with him like a chronic disease. He had the most abject horror of telling an untruth in any form or degree, and he recoiled obsessively from usurping the rights or annexing the possessions of his fellow men.

He didn't even cheat on his income tax. And so what Charles Vine did early that Thursday afternoon was all the more remarkable in that it was completely out of character. When he came to think of it afterwards, he was inclined to blame it on the liqueur.

On his way back to the office after lunch, he heard a telephone ringing in a free-standing phone booth on a street corner. No one was in sight except a few preoccupied passersby. Without the slightest hesitation Vine stepped into the booth, lifted the receiver, and said, "Hello." As simply and suddenly as that, a new chapter in his life began.

"Is that you, Charlie?"

Vine knew perfectly well that the call wasn't meant for him. He had a telephone in his apartment, the number of which was known to his few carefully selected friends. And only two people had ever called him "Charlie"—an antiquated aunt he'd met exactly once, and a math teacher he'd hated with homicidal intensity.

But under the treacherous influence of the liqueur he said, "Yes, speaking," just as if he'd been sitting at his desk at the office taking a call from the branch manager in Richmond.

"We've got your money ready for you, Charlie. Where and

when do we meet, and how will we know you?"

The caller sounded intelligent, even cultured, and amiable. Vine had no doubt whatever that he'd said "money."

"Westmont shopping mall," he suggested promptly. "The benches inside the main entrance. I'll be reading the *Wall Street Journal* with an umbrella across my lap."

"What time."

"I can be there in fifteen minutes."

"Make it half an hour."

By the time Vine reached his post, the fumes of the liqueur had begun to dissipate and hard reality to force itself on his attention. He was already overdue at the office, a thing that had never happened before, and he was going to be very late indeed if he waited until the appointed time. He was so busy watching the minutes dribble irrecoverably past on the big clock over the door that he almost forgot to assume the identifying pose.

The mall was crowded with lunch-hour shoppers and the miscellaneous throng of idlers that invariably congregate in such places. As the time approached, Vine was mildly disconcerted to notice that a young woman with a superabundance of parcels had joined him on the bench. The second time he

looked at her she met his glance goodhumoredly and asked if it was getting warmer outside.

She had large, widely-spaced eyes and a slightly prominent chin that lent her what any male observer who didn't happen to be an orthodontist would probably regard as an engaging simper. Vine certainly wasn't an orthodontist. "Yes, and the wind's died down. You won't need that sweater."

He peeked at the clock again and swept the passing crowd with anxious eyes. By the time he looked back at the girl she'd vanished, leaving behind only a hint of cinnamon scent and a thick brown envelope inscribed "Charlie." Inside it were one hundred twenty-dollar bills.

If it wasn't exactly the suitcase stuffed with bundles of hundreds that so often figures in escapist fiction and television crime dramas, at least it would buy a lot of postprandial liqueurs at the Nesbit House.

Just now Vine was feeling not only sober but distinctly seedy. His exhilaration at having acquired a fistful of money almost without effort wasn't enough to offset his chilling sense of guilt at having impersonated someone and—even more heinous, in his view—having broken his routine.

"One lie begets another," he

thought dismally as he called the office and told them he was feeling ill—which was no lie—and wouldn't be in for the rest of the day. What nefarious deed had he been paid off for? Respectable people didn't settle their debts this way. And who was the real Charlie?

He was still puzzling over that as he walked the three blocks to work next morning, after a night without sleep. He half expected some thug to spring out of a doorway and demand the two thousand. But he made it without mishap to the world headquarters of North American Dragoman and started off his day by completing the previous afternoon's work. That didn't take long, since, as I mentioned earlier, he'd finished off the Smiths yesterday before going to lunch. When you've finished off the Smiths, you're four-fifths through the alphabet.

The firm for which Vine worked was a distributor of electronic appliances and components, and his job was to process warranty registration cards sent in by purchasers. Each morning he sat down with a long tray of newly arrived cards, which had been arranged in alphabetical order by a clerk. With the help of a computer he tabulated and analyzed market research data from the answers

to the questions on the cards.

For the third time that month Vine's day was marred by a visit from a federal agent. North American Dragoman was under investigation for allegedly supplying the United States government with substandard components faked to resemble high quality ones. Vine couldn't see what this had to do with his end of the business, but the agent kept coming back.

This time he made Vine more uncomfortable than usual. Suppose he found out about the two thousand dollars and concluded it was a payoff for arranging the substitution of bad components. What other explanation could Vine offer except the truth, which was so absurd that he hardly believed it himself?

Agent Thoroughgood, who chewed lots of gum and was given to long, brooding silences, finally went away. Vine had his usual Friday lunch at Eddie's Shrimp Boat, ungarnished by spirits of any kind, and by quitting time his work was all caught up.

As he was walking home a stranger accosted him on the sidewalk, laying a hand familiarly on his arm. "Got a minute?" Vine shook himself free and was about to move on when he realized with a start that this was the man he'd talked to on the phone the day before. In

something like panic he looked up and down the street before inspecting the stranger, who was lean, middle-aged, and hatchet-faced. His flashy but tarnished suit looked like something filched from the wardrobe of a third-rate acting company, and his mustache seemed permanently curled to match a smile as phony as the stone in his ring. "One small question, Charlie."

For a moment Vine wondered how this sleazy customer had managed to pick him up on the street when yesterday he hadn't even known what he looked like. But of course he'd been lurking somewhere at the shopping mall while the girl made the payoff, and had followed him home afterwards.

"Could you by *any* chance," the man purred, "make another delivery *exactly* like that last one, on the same terms? Within the next couple of days?" They were standing at the entrance to an arcade, creating little eddies in the pedestrian traffic around them. Heartened by being surrounded by dozens of probably more or less honest citizens, Vine found his voice.

"I'd have to think about that," he said, in a dubious tone that came quite naturally, since he had no idea what he was supposed to be dealing in. Was it heroin, stolen jewelry, diplo-

matic secrets, or Havana cigars?

"I'll call you at noon tomorrow," the man said, and melted into the crowd. Tomorrow was Saturday, so at least he wasn't planning to phone the office. Probably the phone booth again. Vine was resolving to stay well away from that phone booth at noon tomorrow, and at all other times, as he entered the lobby of his apartment building and buzzed for the elevator under the biliously paternal eye of the guard at the desk.

Not feeling particularly hungry, he decided to have a cold supper at home and then sit down with a book and a record and try to forget the tangle he'd got himself into. He had picked his record but was still deliberating over the book when the phone rang and the desk clerk announced a caller. "Federal Agent Thoroughgood to see you, sir," she informed him, adding, in a tone of dispassionate disapproval, "He says it's on official business."

"Send him up," groaned Vine. It occurred to him that in an ordinary apartment building he could have avoided this visit simply by not answering the doorbell.

"Nice music." Something had happened to chase away Agent Thoroughgood's habitual moroseness. By contrast he seemed

almost ebullient. "Tchaikovsky, isn't it?"

"Frescobaldi."

"Oh, sure. Nice place you have here, Mr. Vine." He stood in the middle of the living room, revolving slowly like a fly on a slice of bologna. "But small. Very small. Not many places in here you could hide two grand."

Vine swallowed. "Two grand?"

"Two grand. Like you got from Corcoran."

"I don't know anybody named Corcoran."

"You and he were pretty friendly a while ago up the street."

"That man was a perfect stranger to me. I never saw him before in my life, and he didn't give me a cent."

"Mr. Vine, I need to search your place, here, okay?"

"Have you got a warrant?"

Thoroughgood smiled indulgently. "Too late for that. You let me in of your own free will, remember?"

"But I thought . . ."

The agent took off his jacket, revealing an ugly revolver in a shoulder holster. "If you'll just keep out of the way," he said, "I'll try not to make too much of a mess. Anything you've got locked, unlock it."

He went about his work so deftly, so carefully, and with such devastating thoroughness that in other circumstances Vine

would have found it a pleasure to watch him. He sifted through Vine's entire wardrobe with professional detachment and dismantled furniture with practiced fingers. He tested the seals on packages of frozen food, shook cans, plumbed picture frames, probed ventilators, palpated pillows, tapped woodwork, and methodically examined several hundred books one at a time for hidden bills.

After an hour and a half of this, during which Frescobaldi gave way to Mozart and then, by request, to Tchaikovsky, Agent Thoroughgood had found a total of sixteen dollars. Undaunted but looking a trifle tired about the eyes, he picked up the telephone and made a call.

"Colby? Earl. I'm at Vine's. He says he hasn't got the money, and he hasn't. Let me check this through with you again. You tailed him here from the mall yesterday afternoon. He didn't leave here until he went to work this morning. You tailed him to the restaurant at noon and back. I tailed him home. Uncle Corky stopped him on the street for a minute, but nothing changed hands. I just took this place apart and the two grand isn't here. He couldn't have spent much of it at the restaurant. He must have it squirreled away at the office. . . . Of

course I searched him, too." He beckoned urgently to Vine and made good this last assertion by prodding him over and poking through his wallet.

"Yes, there's a safe downstairs but they haven't got anything of his in it. And they haven't logged any visitors to this apartment all week. . . . Well, then, why don't you come on over and find it? We'll give you half an hour."

He folded several sticks of gum into his mouth and composed himself to wait, masticating to the ever-shifting tempi of the *Romeo and Juliet* suite. In much less than a half hour the phone rang and Thoroughgood instructed the desk clerk to "send her up." The cup of Vine's indignation ran over when the girl from the shopping mall walked in.

"You're the one who gave me the money!" he sputtered without pausing for reflection.

"Now we're getting somewhere," the girl said, making herself at home. She was wearing a jean skirt, a rust-colored cardigan with buttons made from real buffalo nickels, and fresh rations of cinnamon cologne. "You admit you've got the money. But I didn't give it to you—not exactly. It came from Uncle Corky."

"You see," Thoroughgood was moved to explain, "that's how

we got onto you. Colby and I were tagging along with Corky Corcoran when you picked up your payoff. I recognized you because I'd interviewed you at North American Dragoman . . ."

"Wait a minute. Who's Colby?"

The girl raised her hand in a gesture reminiscent of the schoolroom. Since she was lounging back in the corner of the sofa at the time, it also seemed faintly Hitlerian. "I'm Colby Corcoran," she said.

"Colby Corcoran? As in Corky Corcoran?"

"He's my uncle."

"The guy with the waxed mustache is your uncle, and you're pretending you're not working for him?"

"Colby works for the federal government," Thoroughgood asserted with gravity.

"Let's say we and Uncle Corky have been collaborating for our mutual benefit," said Colby. "He's sort of the black sheep of the family, and my dad likes me to keep an eye on him. Dad's the police chief of Fenton Station, Iowa."

"That where you're from?"

Thoroughgood squirmed. "Look, folks, this is all very cosy, but it isn't getting us where we need to get. Where's the money, Mr. Vine?"

A red light came on in Vine's subconscious, warning him off

territory where telling a lie might become too tempting an option. "I don't believe you two are federal agents at all," he said. "You're just a couple of crooks." He strove for firmness but thought he probably achieved only petulance.

"Show him your I.D., Colby. He's already seen mine twice."

"Okay, so you're federal agents. What are the charges?"

"We're not charging you with anything," said Colby. "What you did with those chips is a matter for the police." Her eyes, Vine reflected, were really very nice, and when she talked business, she assumed a little frown that wasn't at all unbecoming either.

"What chips?"

"The microchips you stole from North American Dragoman and sold to Tronix Limited."

"Microchips! Look, miss, I'm a retail market analyst. I don't know a microchip from a potato chip. And I've never even heard of Tronix Limited."

"Sure you have," said Thoroughgood. "You've heard of Uncle Corky, and he's Tronix Limited. The biggest distributor of OJ in the state."

"That wouldn't be orange juice, would it?"

"That would be Oriental Junk."

Vine stared at Thorough-

good. "I thought you were trying to prove that North American Dragoman was peddling junk to the government."

"We are. They did."

"Well, what's that got to do with my supposedly stealing microchips from North American Dragoman and selling them to Uncle Corky?"

"Maybe nothing. You tell us. We didn't fit you into the picture until you collected your payoff from Uncle Corky. Like we said, Colby and I are sort of working along with Corky because he's the one who stuck North American Dragoman with a load of OJ about six weeks ago when one of their regular suppliers went on strike. Only this OJ was faked to look exactly like high-quality American-made components, and apparently even North American Dragoman was fooled. Anyway, they sold it to the Department of Defense."

"Now, let me get this straight. Corky sells junk to North American, pretending it's good. And now you think I stole good stuff from North American and sold it to Corky, pretending it was junk?"

"That's what he says. We haven't seen it."

"Corky came right out and admitted to you he bought stolen goods?"

"He didn't say you stole the

chips from North American, but since you work there, and you called him up with a load of top-quality stuff at hot OJ prices, it seems a logical conclusion, wouldn't you say?"

"No, I wouldn't. As I've already told you, I know absolutely nothing about electronic components. I have no access to them. And I certainly never called Uncle Corky." Mentally he was cursing the real Charlie to perdition but wishing he'd stop by on his way there and straighten up this mess.

Colby settled deeper into the sofa. "This is going to be a long night. I wonder—would you have any tea around?"

"He's got three brands," said Earl Thoroughgood.

Vine put a kettle on to boil and turned off the stereo. "You say there are no charges against me. Why are you so interested in that money? It's not your money."

"Earl. Conference."

They went into a huddle behind the partly closed door of the bedroom, and when they returned to the living room Thoroughgood was full of renewed animation. "This is brand-new carpet you have in here, isn't it, Mr. Vine? Just installed?"

"Few days ago."

"It's got to come up."

"Now, wait a minute. The

management of this building isn't going to stand for your ripping up the carpet—"

"No ripping needed," Thoroughgood promised, with the suave mendacity of a used-car salesman. "We'll just pull it loose at the edges and look underneath. Won't take five minutes. Where'd I put my tools? Your kettle's boiling."

It took an hour, what with moving furniture and prying up molding and then putting it all back again. They spent the last ten minutes chasing a hump in the carpet around the room and finally buried it under the sofa. They didn't find any money.

"Okay, Mr. Vine, we seem to be at a stalemate," said Thoroughgood, throwing tools into his toolbox with unnecessary vehemence. "You say you didn't steal those chips and turn them over to Uncle Corky, and maybe you didn't. You say the money isn't here, and by George, it isn't. But you sure as blazes picked up that money at the shopping mall yesterday, and we have to have it back."

"Have it back? I thought you said it came from Uncle Corky."

"Not exactly," said Colby. "He asked me to pass some money to you. We figured you were the OJ supplier, and we needed a way to prove it, so we took Corky's money out of the en-

velope and put in two thousand in marked bills. But you delivered good stuff instead of OJ, so we want the money back."

"Just like that. What are you offering in return—Corky's original two thousand?"

"Can't do that," said Thoroughgood, looking grim. "That would amount to conspiracy to commit a felony, at the very least. Why don't you turn the money over to us? You won't be out anything. I mean, you stole the chips in the first place—"

"I keep telling you I didn't steal anything. I've never stolen so much as a paper clip in my life." Was his tone more convincing than before? He thought Colby looked at him differently after that. "You're not out anything, either. You've got Corky's money, haven't you?"

"We need *our* money back. It was marked for another job and recovered as evidence. We sort of borrowed it for this job."

"As I said several hours ago, you're just a couple of cheap crooks."

"You didn't say 'cheap' before," observed Colby in an aggrieved tone. "And there's nothing illegal about what we did. But you're making it terribly awkward for us because, you see, there's no way we can legally compel you to return those bills without disclosing where they came from."

"Then whose property are they?"

Thoroughgood was back in the kitchen, brewing another pot of tea. "Ours. The government's. Nobody's," he shouted with generous impartiality.

Although Vine didn't know it himself, that last word was what he'd been waiting to hear. "Do you carry a revolver in your purse?" he asked Colby.

"Sometimes. I didn't bring it tonight."

"You're not a karate black belt or anything, are you?"

"Not that I know of. What are you doing?"

Vine took the key out of the deadbolt lock, removed the spare key from the desk drawer, led her out of the apartment, and closed the door, locking Thoroughgood in. Out in the corridor he knelt and inserted two fingers inside the door from below, where the carpenters had cut off half an inch so that it would fit over the new carpet, leaving its hollow interior open all across the bottom. He slipped the envelope of money out of the cavity and stuck it into his pocket.

"You're a good sport, Mr. Vine," said Colby with a twinkle of mischief as they took the elevator to the lobby. "But why'd you lock Earl in?"

"Just evening up the odds."

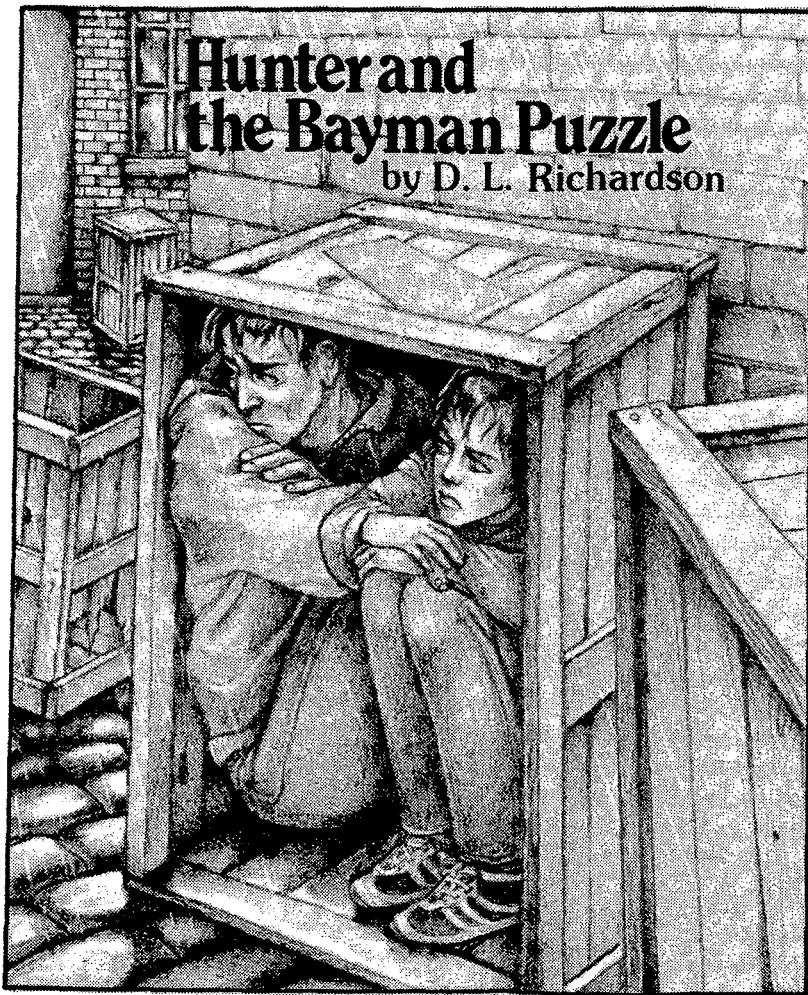
As they passed the desk, one of Vine's fellow tenants was just coming in, whistling with more vigor than virtuosity and taking a step sideways for every three or four forward. "Where you been, Charlie?" he bubbled, addressing the guard standing near the desk. "Haven't seen you all week."

"Had the flu," replied the guard, a dour, dumpy man of no particular age whose vaguely insolent stare always made Vine feel as if he were trespassing in his own apartment building. With a jolt Vine recalled that Crystal Security, the firm that supplied guards for the building, also staffed North American Dragoman's security force. The real Charlie had stood up.

The phone at the desk was ringing as Vine gently propelled Colby through the glass doors and out into the cool spring night. Would Charlie catch up with them first, he wondered, or would it be Thoroughgood? Or even Uncle Corky? It didn't really matter because he was resolved to spend as much of the money as he could before anybody stopped him, and to enjoy it to the fullest possible extent. After all, it wasn't as if it belonged to anybody.

Hunter and the Bayman Puzzle

by D. L. Richardson



“**H**unter, I’m getting wet.”

Rain splattered and danced on the pavement. I scrunched my shoulders up against the dampness trying

to sneak down the back of my neck. “Join the club.”

“You’re getting paid to get wet.”

“Just think of it as secretarial overtime.”

"Feels more like hazardous duty."

I grinned over my shoulder at her. "All those temporary secretaries I had were always begging to go out on a case with me."

She pushed her hands deeper into her jacket pockets. "Next time you can call one of them."

"And let you miss out on all this fun and excitement?" I shook my head. "You know I wouldn't do that to you, Tyler."

"Gee, thanks." She grimaced and pressed back against the brick wall. I returned my attention to the far end of the alley. Still quiet. I pushed back my sleeve for a quick look at the illuminated dial of my watch. Two A.M. Tracey saw the movement.

"What time is it?"

"You don't want to know."

Actually, I didn't want to tell her. She hadn't been all that excited about coming with me—"Stakeouts are boring, Hunter"—and she'd been even less enthusiastic about leaving the car two blocks away. Then, about an hour ago, the rain had started. Not a violent, blowing storm. Just a gentle, persistent Kentucky rain that, if you were at home in bed, would have been better than a sleeping pill.

Her announcement that she was getting wet was her first comment since the onslaught of

the rain. An hour of damp silence was not a good sign. With her only an arm's length away, I wasn't about to announce she'd been here for three hours. That would have been suicide.

A door opened at the dead-end of the alley. I reached back, and my hand came to rest on her bluejeaned knee. Without a sound she was crouched by my side to squint through the sheer curtain of rain.

Two raincoated figures appeared in the alley, the light from the open doorway identifying them as men. When the door shut, they were just vague shapes in the faint glow of a distant street light. Rain sounds disguised the words of their brief exchange. The driver's door opened, and in the brief glow of the interior light, the other man tested the alley door. Satisfied, he joined his companion in the car. The muffled slam of the door was followed by the stirring of the ignition.

"Get back," I hissed in Tyler's ear.

As I pushed her toward a deep shadow formed by stacked crates and a fire escape, headlights flooded the alley with their brilliance before clicking down to low beam. Tyler crouched into the deepest part of the shadow with me behind her, encircling her with my arms and burying my face in

the neck of her jacket. She burrowed her face down toward her chest. The car purred its way past us, stopped briefly at the deserted street, and then hung a right. Neither of us moved until the sound of engine faded and all that was left was the hypnotic patter of rain.

"You can move now, Hunter." She lifted her head, and I felt her breath on my face.

"I was just starting to get warm."

"You should have thought of that before you dragged me out in the rain. Now what?"

"Now I'm going to take a look inside and you're going to wait here. If I'm not back in an hour, go for help."

I flicked the beam of my flashlight over the stacked crates and then returned it to my pocket.

"If those two men come back, what am I supposed to do? Whistle the UK fight song?" Her voice was hushed.

Even empty, the large wooden packing crates were heavy and awkward to handle. "You could help me with these, you know," I pointed out to her.

With her help I got the largest crate turned over so that its open side faced the brick building. I stacked two small crates on top of it, leaned another crate against its side, and surveyed my handiwork.

"You still haven't answered my question, Hunter."

"Those two aren't coming back tonight. If they do, it's my problem. Yours is to keep quiet and keep out of sight." I pointed toward the large crate. "Get in."

"You're crazy!"

I pulled her by the arm. "Tracey, I don't have time to argue."

"This is terrific," she muttered. "My boss has just made me an accessory to breaking and entering."

"I'm not going to break anything. I'm just entering."

"And I get to sit in a crate for an hour. In the rain. In an alley. In one of the roughest sections of Lexington at," she grabbed my left wrist, "two in the morning." She dropped my arm.

"Just think of it as an adventure."

"Just think of it as triple overtime."

I grinned and started to leave. She grabbed my jacket. "Not so fast."

"What?"

"The keys to your car. If I have to go for help, I don't plan to do it on foot."

I dropped my car keys into her outstretched hand. She did some twisting and contorting to get them in her jeans pocket. Just tall enough for her to sit upright, the crate was not wide enough for her to stretch her

long legs. I pulled a penlight from my shirt pocket, tested it, and handed it to her.

"Don't forget. One hour."

I checked the area before stepping out of the deep shadows. My jogging shoes made little noise as I trotted toward the end of the alley. When I reached the door, I pulled out my flashlight and tucked it under my arm, directing its beam toward the lock. It took a little longer than I expected to pick it, and I was decidedly wet by the time I closed the door behind me.

My hour had stretched to an hour and ten minutes by the time I let myself back into the alley. The rain had stopped, but its dampness still infiltrated the night.

"You can come out now, Tyler."

"Easier said than done," came the muffled reply.

I stepped around the crate and took her by the hands to pull her out.

"You're late, Hunter." She worked at the stiffness in her limbs.

"You're still here."

"Only because I felt like an arthritic pretzel." She did two quick knee bends. "Did you find anything?"

"Later. Right now I want to get out of here."

"I hope you have someplace warm in mind."

"Okay, Hunter, what did you find?"

She accepted the mug of hot chocolate from me and scooted over to make room on the braided rug in front of the fireplace. Sitting cross-legged, her short, dark hair nearly dry, she wore a pair of my sweatpants and one of my flannel shirts while her clothes took a spin in the dryer.

I jabbed the poker into the fire and sent a rush of sparks up the chimney. Satisfied with the energetic popping and cracking, I leaned back on my elbow and stretched my legs at an angle toward the fire.

"Not much of anything." I set my coffee next to my elbow.

She took a quiet sip from her mug. "Sounds as if Mr. Bayman was wrong."

I shook my head. "I'm not so sure."

"But you said you didn't find anything."

"That's just it. There was nothing to find."

Tyler looked as confused as I had felt when, earlier, I had stood in the eerie quiet of the warehouse.

"Quit frowning, Tyler. You'll give yourself wrinkles."

"They'll go along with the gray hairs you're giving me. Explain yourself."

"When I said I didn't find

much of anything, I meant that literally. The place was practically empty."

"No inventory at all?"

"Not enough to fill a semi."

"But that warehouse should have enough in it to fill several tractor-trailers."

I nodded. "Exactly."

She thought about that for a moment, a tiny frown coming to rest between her eyebrows as she stared past me toward the kitchen. I resisted the urge to reach out and rub it away.

"What about the office?" She looked back at me.

"A few signs of recent activity. Dust. Trash in the trash can."

"The files?"

I pondered her position. Still crosslegged, she now rested her elbows on the floor in front of her and cradled her chin in her hands.

"How do you do that?"

"Magic. What about the files?"

"Nothing suspicious, except that I couldn't find anything more recent than six months ago."

"I should have gone with you. You're a disaster when it comes to files."

"That's why God made secretaries."

"So what are you going to tell Mr. Bayman?"

I sighed, lay down on the rug, hands interlaced under my head,

and stared up at the ceiling.

"I don't know. There are any number of explanations for the nearly empty warehouse, and as you say, filing is not exactly my strong suit. Nothing else I've come up with seems questionable or out of the ordinary." I thought for a moment. "But something doesn't feel right." I turned my head toward her. "Does that sound crazy?"

"Not to me."

The firelight danced on her dark hair and in the intent gaze of her hazel eyes. Sometimes those eyes really get to me.

The dryer went off. Tyler straightened.

"My clothes."

She got to her feet and stepped across my midsection. I grabbed one bare, slender ankle. She looked down at me with a half question, half warning on her face. I lifted my mug.

"Bring me some fresh coffee on your way back?"

She shook her head, took the proffered cup, and padded to the kitchen.

"You still haven't said what you're going to tell Mr. Bayman."

Her voice came to me from what had once been a large pantry just off the kitchen. After I bought the farmhouse, I did some remodeling, and the room now did double duty as a pantry and a laundry room.

"I haven't decided yet," I called back.

"He doesn't strike me as the type of man who would be satisfied with your evaluation of the situation as not feeling right."

The variations in her voice revealed that she was changing clothes. I smiled to myself.

"Maybe I can stall him for one more day, give myself time to come up with something more concrete."

"How do you plan to do that?"

She appeared in the kitchen doorway and padded back across the room. As she stepped over me, she turned her white crew socks right-side-out.

"Where's my coffee?"

"You don't need another cup of coffee at this hour." She sat on the raised hearth and pulled her socks on. "How are you going to convince him to give you more time?"

I sat up. "I'm not sure."

"Well, you'd better be thinking of something because he'll be in the office in just a few hours." She consulted her watch. "Seven to be exact."

"I'll think of something by then, and if I don't, I'll wing it."

She finished lacing the navy running shoes.

"Well, why don't you get in a little practice and wing me home."

"Your wish is my command."

She sighed. "Never a witness around when you need one."

Morris Bayman smiled politely at Tracey when she handed him the cup of freshly brewed coffee. Its aroma filled my office, but I still caught the floral scent of her perfume when she brought my mug to me and passed behind my chair on her way out. The door closed discreetly behind her.

Mr. Bayman sipped tentatively at the coffee before placing cup and saucer on the edge of my desk. He had arrived at precisely eleven A.M., twenty minutes after we opened the office, with the air of a man who has come expecting definite answers. He adjusted his cuffs before speaking.

"Well, Mr. Hunter, I trust you are prepared to make a full report."

"My secretary is finishing the typing right now."

He looked at his watch.

"I expected you to be ready for me."

"Normally that would be the case, but sometimes a private investigator is forced to keep strange working hours."

Tracey would have been amused by my formality. I think it was Bayman. He sat ramrod straight across the desk from me. Everything about him spoke

of precision and punctuality, from the spotlessly shined shoes to the neatly pressed suit to the well-kept salt-and-pepper hair: Even his facial features were neat and sharp and precise. It was the sort of presence that inspired a salute, even from nonmilitary personnel. It was definitely the sort of presence that kept people on their toes.

"A verbal report will be more than satisfactory, Mr. Hunter. I would expect to receive a written copy of your findings later on, of course, but at present I'm interested in knowing what you have learned."

So much for stalling for time. And while I was at it, I could forget about impressing him with my gut feelings. Tyler's light knock granted me a short reprieve.

"Come in."

She crossed quietly to my side and handed me a folder.

"Mr. Bayman's copy is in there also."

"Thank you."

I could have sworn I saw a grin toy with her features.

"Will there be anything else?"

"No. You can go on to lunch." I stopped her at the door. "Oh, Trace. Make Gatterman buy you an expensive lunch."

I grinned at the disapproving look that crossed her face just before she glanced in Bayman's direction and shut the door be-

hind her. Still grinning, I returned my attention to Bayman, who obviously did not approve of the personal nature of the remark. What can I say? Sometimes the rebel in me gets out of control.

I opened the folder, pulled out a copy of the three page report, and slid it across the desk.

"I think you'll find that self-explanatory."

Generally, while a client reads a report, I find something to occupy myself. Stand at the window. Sort through the mail. Reread the report. Anything to give the client a semblance of privacy and to keep myself from feeling like some sort of peeping Tom.

I say "generally" because sometimes a client so intrigues me or so baffles me that I can't help watching him read in hope of finding some clue.

Watching Bayman scrutinize every line, I wondered for the nth time why a man like him would want his son investigated. A client is under no obligation to fill me in on his reasons, but it doesn't stop me from wondering. And after coming up with nothing more suspicious than a nearly empty warehouse, I was wondering even more.

Bayman finished his reading, then scanned the three pages one more time before returning

his attention to me. His green eyes met mine with a directness that, I'm sure, many found unsettling.

"You appear to have done quite a thorough job, Mr. Hunter."

"That's what I get paid for."

"Do you get paid to do much breaking and entering?"

I smiled. "The report doesn't say anything about breaking and entering."

It was Bayman's turn to smile, but it qualified as a smile only because the corners of his mouth turned up.

"No, it doesn't. But I know my son, and breaking and entering is the only way you could have gotten into that warehouse."

I returned his tiny, mirthless smile.

"But no matter," he continued. "I asked you to do a job, and you did it. How you accomplished the task is none of my concern."

He drew his checkbook from an inside jacket pocket and began writing with a gold pen.

I couldn't let it go.

"Five days isn't a lot of time to investigate a person, especially when I don't know what I'm looking for."

"And I appreciate and commend your efforts and your concentrated attention to this case." He stopped before signing the

check. "Is there something you aren't telling me, Mr. Hunter?"

"Everything I found out is in the report."

"But?"

"A warehouse that should be nearly full but isn't raises some questions."

That mirthless smile returned. "There is no need to concern yourself about that, Mr. Hunter." He signed the check and handed it across the desk. "I trust that will cover your expenses and compensate you for any time taken away from other projects."

The amount was exactly twice what it should have been. I was sure he was waiting for a reaction to the inflated sum and had no trouble denying him anything more than a polite smile.

"Thank you."

He studied me for a moment, wondering, I think, if he had misjudged me. But then the look was gone, and he was on his feet, extending his hand and making his departure.

I sat at my desk after he left and pondered the check. Or should I say, pondered the possible implications of the check. After fifteen minutes I decided an empty stomach was a hindrance to thinking, so I went around the corner to O'Leary's for some of their incredible lasagna.

By the time I returned to the office, my stomach was satisfied even if my mind wasn't. Tyler was busy typing, a tiny frown of concentration just visible over the top of the big-rimmed glasses she wears when she types or reads. She paused wordlessly to wave two messages and then put them on the front edge of her desk before returning to her typing.

I glanced at them on the way to my desk. One was from my agent, and one was from my editor. Both wanted to hear from me as soon as possible. I fashioned two small paper wads and scored four points on bank shots into the trash can.

I withdrew the check from my jacket and contemplated it once more before putting it on the desk and weighting it with a fist-sized chunk of quartz.

The case was over. I had satisfied the client, who had paid me generously for my time and my ability to keep my nose out of his business. That was that. Time to get on to other things. Things like a book that needed three more chapters and had a hero in a predicament that even Steven Spielberg or George Lucas couldn't get him out of.

The phone rang three times before I realized no typing sounds issued from the outer office. A glance at my watch as I reached for the receiver told

me I'd been working for about forty-five minutes.

"Hunter Investigations."

"Let me speak to Tracey."

"Hey, Phil. Have a nice lunch?"

Phillip Gatterman headed security at a downtown hotel. He wasn't too crazy about me, but Tyler was another matter altogether.

"None of your business, Hunter. Just let me speak to Tracey."

"She's not here."

"Not there?" Concern came across the line loud and clear. "She did get back there after lunch, didn't she?"

"She got back before I did. You two had an awfully short lunch. Anything wrong?"

"If she's not there, where is she?"

"She stepped out for a minute." Now I was beginning to be concerned. "What's this all about, Gatterman?"

"She didn't tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

He sighed. "Some guy was hassling her over here."

"She's a big girl. She knows how to handle pushy guys with heavyweight come-ons."

"This guy wasn't coming on to her. He was hassling her about a case you're working on."

"What case?"

"I don't know. She said it was confidential."

"I suppose you handled him in your usual inimitable fashion."

"I didn't get the chance. When he saw me coming, he made a quick exit. What's going on, Hunter?"

"Like Tyler said, it's confidential." I wondered why my eyes kept going to the check.

"Look, Hunter, getting yourself involved in messy divorce cases is one thing, but getting Tracey involved is another."

"I don't think that's any of your business, Gatterman."

"Maybe I should make it my business," Gatterman snapped.

"Maybe you should ask her first. I'll tell her you called."

As I hung up, Tracey appeared in the doorway.

"Tell me who called?"

"Tell you Gatterman called. What happened at the hotel?"

"Lunch."

"And?"

Her eyes narrowed slightly. "Phillip Gatterman has a big mouth."

"He seems to think you need protecting. From me as much as from anyone else."

"He also has a lot of nerve."

I took small consolation in the fact that she was genuinely ticked at Gatterman.

"So, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because nothing happened."

"Humor me and fill me in on all of the nothing."

She sighed. "Jefferson Bayman came up to me in the lobby and said that he didn't know who had hired you but that you should mind your own business and keep your nose out of his. I told him I didn't know what he was talking about, and he told me to quit acting because he knew you'd been following him and he wanted it to stop or he'd have you arrested for harassment. I didn't spoil his fun by telling him that only happens on television."

It sounded like a bored recitation of old facts.

"You sure it was Bayman?"

She nodded. "I recognized him from the picture his father gave you."

"What else did he say?"

"Just more of the same. Stay away. Mind your own business. Phillip started toward us and Bayman left."

Would an innocent man have reacted so angrily? I would have if I found out someone was checking up on me.

"He didn't threaten me," Tracey continued. "He didn't even touch me. And I knew that by the time he finished his outburst we were off the case. We are off the case, aren't we?"

I nodded. "Bayman was satisfied with the report."

Don't ask me why I didn't tell her about the check. I don't know why.

"See. Everyone was getting excited over nothing."

"Gatterman was the only one getting excited."

"Whatever."

She turned to go.

"From now on, Tyler, when someone gives you a message for me, make sure you deliver it."

From the doorway she studied me with those killer hazel eyes, and a knowing smile lit her face.

I swear that woman can read minds.

"You're not going to believe this."

I looked up from the mess on my desk.

Tyler almost grinned. "Ever consider starting over?"

"Bite your tongue." I leaned back. "What is it I'm not going to believe?"

"Jefferson Bayman is waiting to see you."

"So?"

"He wants to hire you."

I looked at the chunk of quartz even though the check was no longer there, having been deposited in the bank as soon as I convinced myself that if the client was satisfied I should be satisfied.

"Well?" Tyler wanted to know.

"Send him in."

I was standing behind my

desk when Tracey ushered the junior Bayman in and made quick introductions. There was no handshake.

"Don't go just yet, Tyler." My words stopped her before she got to the door. "There's something I want you to hear."

With a puzzled look on her face, she stepped back toward me, stopping at the corner of the desk. I leveled my gaze at the tall man in front of me.

"I believe you owe my secretary an apology."

I expected resistance, even sullenness. Morris Bayman had struck me as the kind of man who had never apologized to anyone, and I had no reason to expect anything different from his son. All that like-father-like-son stuff. So I was prepared to be forceful. I got my second surprise of the day.

"I apologize for the scene at the hotel, Ms. Tyler." He addressed her directly, genuine contrition on his face. "My behavior was completely out of line, and I'm sorry if I upset you or embarrassed you."

Tyler smiled graciously. "I accept your apology, Mr. Bayman."

He smiled back. It was a little tentative, but Tyler's smiles are hard to resist. She left, and I indicated that he should have a seat.

I already knew, from photos

and from surveillance; that Jefferson Bayman did not look like his father. But being this close and having this opportunity to study him openly, I was struck by the complete lack of resemblance.

The younger Bayman was taller and thinner and more relaxed. His hair was light brown, almost blond, his eyes were blue, and while he did not hesitate to make eye contact, there was no trace of his father's piercing, attention-commanding gaze. His features were softened by a feminine influence that made him look younger than his thirty-two years. I wondered what his mother looked like.

"I am sorry about accosting your secretary like that."

"Are you saying that because you mean it or because you want information from me?" Sometimes I'm not as gracious as Tyler.

He looked away momentarily. "I guess I deserved that." He met my eyes again. "I'm genuinely sorry, Mr. Hunter."

I nodded once as my way of saying I believed him. What I was finding hard to believe was that he was related to Morris Bayman.

"Mr. Hunter, I want to hire you."

There, at least, was some of the Bayman directness.

He went on. "I know that must sound like a strange request, since you were recently hired to investigate me."

"Strange just about covers it."

He almost smiled.

"It also sounds like a conflict of interest," I added.

"I'm not asking you to reveal any information you consider part of that case. I know my father hired you to find out if I was involved in illegal activities. You don't have to deny or confirm it. I don't care about that. What I do care about is finding out who has been making these accusations to my father and why."

I managed to keep myself from looking toward the quartz paperweight.

"What makes you think anyone has been accusing you of illegal activities?"

"The fact that my father had me investigated is proof enough. Your investigation didn't turn up anything illegal because I'm not involved in anything illegal. Nor do I have any desire to be. The family business is more than lucrative enough for me, and despite what my father thinks, I do have a good head for business. For him even to consider the possibility that I'm involved in something outside the law means that someone had to be doing a pretty good

selling job. And believe me, Mr. Hunter, my father is not an easy person to sell."

"Why don't you just ask him?"

His short laugh was full of disdain. "You've met my father, Mr. Hunter."

I could see his point. The elder Bayman would not like the idea of being challenged by anyone and especially not by his son.

"Besides, Mr. Hunter, this is my problem, and if there's one thing I've learned from my father, it's to fight my own battles."

"Do you have any idea who might want to smear your name with your father?"

"I can think of several who might, but I can't think of any my father would believe."

Somehow I didn't think there were many men Morris Bayman would believe about anything.

"Maybe you'd better give me a list of possibles anyway," I said.

Fifteen minutes later I had a list of three people who might have reason to want to cause a rift between father and son and who would benefit from that rift. I also had a changed view of Jefferson Bayman.

I heard him talking to Tyler as he left. After the outer door closed, she came into my office.

"He's a married man, Tyler."

"Green is not one of your best colors, Hunter."

One of these days I'll learn.

She perched on the front edge of my desk. "Are you taking him as a client?"

I nodded.

"Doesn't that qualify as a conflict of interest?"

"Probably."

"And you're doing it anyway?"

I smiled.

"Why?"

"Because something's going on, Tyler. Something beyond what I'm being told."

"A power play between father and son?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"What difference does it make?"

"The difference is I'm in the middle. I was manipulated into being there and I want to know why."

"Where are you going to start?"

"Not me. We."

"**H**unter, I don't like this." "What's the matter? It's not raining, and I'm not making you sit in a crate."

"No, but you're making me an accessory before, during, and after the fact. Twice in the same week."

The tumblers released the

lock. "Some people would find fault with paradise." I pushed the door open and pulled Tyler in with me.

"We're a long way from Walden Pond," she pointed out.

The closing of the door echoed softly behind us. Tyler wrinkled her nose.

"Ugh. This place gives me the creeps."

I knew how she felt. Something about a cavernous, nearly empty warehouse at one in the A.M. makes you talk in whispers and keep a close watch over your shoulder. That and the added fact of illegal entry.

"The office is up there." I pointed across the way to a flight of wooden stairs leading to a glassed-in office.

"So?"

"So why do you think I brought you along?"

"So you wouldn't be lonely during the ride to the police station."

"Will you get up there and go through the files?"

Muttering something about a new job description, she headed for the stairs. I watched, admiring the fit of her jeans.

"Cut it out, Hunter."

Trying to decide how she did that, I began my own search.

The warehouse was dimly illuminated by what some people refer to as "security lighting." That meant that single light-

bulbs burned at oddly spaced intervals, creating alternate pools of murky light, dusky shadows, and deep gloom. How much security it provided in a windowless warehouse I never could figure out.

I poked into the darkness, the crates, and the boxes with my flashlight and found nothing. In fact, although I couldn't be sure, it looked as if everything was exactly the way it had been a few nights earlier.

Talk about getting curiouser and curiouser. Damn! What was going on?

I was standing in the middle of the floor trying to figure that one out when Tyler came scurrying down the stairs.

"Let's get out of here, Hunter."

She went right on past me and toward the alley. Because of her long, hurrying strides, I didn't catch up until the door.

"What's your hurry, Tyler? Got a late date?"

"Cut the comedy, and let's get out of here."

I checked the alleyway before we stepped out and made sure the door locked behind us. We were about halfway to the street when Tyler stopped dead in her tracks. I heard it, too. The rumble of a quickly approaching semi.

The crate where Tyler had spent a cramped hour was where we'd left it. I pushed her into it

and crawled in after her. It was a tight fit, but it was also just in time. As the tractor-trailer idled on the street in front of the warehouse, a car entered the alley.

"Uh-oh."

Tyler frowned. "That's putting it mildly."

The car stopped at the dead-end of the alley. Two car doors opened and shut with the sound of a well-made foreign. After a short pause, the door we had just left through opened and closed. I looked at Tyler and she looked at me, but we were both doing more listening than seeing. A low rumble that must have been the huge, garage-type door on the street preceded the release of air brakes and the sound of the semi backing its way into the warehouse. The big door rumbled shut.

"Now what?" Tyler whispered.

"It's a strange hour to be making deliveries."

"Forget it, Hunter."

"Aren't you the least bit curious?"

"That just about describes it. The least bit."

"I guess that means you want to go."

"I don't think this crate is the safest place in the world for us right now."

She had a point.

I crawled out cautiously and

looked around. No guards in the alley. I reached in the crate.

"Come on."

She took my hand and we stole down the alley to the street. I peered around the corner. No guards on the street as far as I could see.

"Got your running shoes on, Tyler?"

At four o'clock that afternoon, courtesy of my friend Charlie Whisk, computer whiz extraordinaire, I had the bank statements of the three people on my list of possibles. I didn't ask how he got them. I didn't want to know. A hacker's secrets are his own as far as I'm concerned. Of course, everyone else's secrets can be his, too, if he pushes the right buttons, but I don't like to think about that.

"Hunter, Jefferson Bayman is on the phone." Tyler stood in the doorway.

I reached for the receiver.

"He's been arrested."

Curiouser and curiouser.

“Well, Hunter, you certainly know how to pick clients.”

Agnes Braggaducci munched on a breadstick. She chewed just the way she did everything else—as if it had to be done yesterday. At an even five feet, she was a fifty-year-old miniature

dynamo that never seemed to stop. While trying to compensate for what she considers to be two major deterrents to her career—her height (or lack of it) and her sex—she tends to come across like Attila the Hun. But she's a good attorney with enough regular clients with good-sized bank accounts to be willing to take on cases that might be less promising financially. I've referred more than a few people to her, and she always says the same thing.

"What makes you say that, Aggie?"

She speared some lettuce from her salad and pointed it at me.

"This guy hires you and within twenty-four hours he's being arrested for dealing in stolen goods." She devoured the lettuce. "All this after you'd just spent a week investigating him, per the order of his father. Don't you private eyes have some sort of code of ethics that says something about conflict of interest?"

I was getting tired of hearing that phrase.

"We just make it up as we go along."

"So, how did you miss it?" Aggie asked, showering her plate with parmesan cheese.

"Miss what?"

"The fencing operation."

"What makes you think I did?"

"You mean you took on a client you knew to be dealing in stolen goods?"

"I didn't say that." I tore off a piece of fresh-baked bread. "What do the police have?"

"An anonymous tip about a delivery to a certain warehouse being used to store stolen property. Bayman on the premises going through some of the merchandise. Unburned scraps of bills of lading indicating the rightful owners of a truckload of TV's, VCR's, disk players, etc."

"They arrested Bayman on the premises?"

She nodded as she chewed her spaghetti. "Caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Or in this case, it was a crate of Walkmans."

"You said the bills of lading were burned."

"In a metal trash can in the office. There were just enough pieces left for identification. They also found phone bills of lading and bills of sale on the desk. One of them was still being printed by one of those personal computers everyone is dying to have these days."

"What did Bayman have to say about all this?"

Over the phone with Jefferson Bayman I had gotten only bits and pieces. Deciding to put my time to better use by trying to figure this puzzle out, which

meant coming up with more pieces than I had at the time, I had called Aggie, talked her out of drinks with a stuffy tax lawyer, and had her go to see him in my place.

"What they always say in those old movies. He was framed." She finished man- gling a bite of bread and swal- lowed. "According to Bayman, he got a call at home saying smoke was coming from the warehouse. So naturally he jumps in his clothes and his car and goes. Only when he arrives, there's no smoke, but there are a lot of boxes that shouldn't be. There are also men he's never seen before and the manager of the warehouse, whom he does know. About the time he starts going through the boxes the po- lice arrive and the rest, as they say, will be on the eleven o'clock news."

"What about the men? The manager?"

"They were arrested, too, and from what I could find out from a friendly on duty at the time, they were all singing like birds in spring."

"Incriminating Bayman."

"Just as hard and fast as they could. According to them, this has been going on for quite some time. Bayman had the manager fire the regular crew and hire this bunch, who, by the way, apparently have records

that would not pass a white- glove inspection. They average two truckloads a week, and the merchandise never sits in the warehouse for more than thirty- six hours."

"Must have been some friendly."

She smiled. "Let's just say I have my ways." She twirled more spaghetti on her fork. "So. What do you think?"

"About Bayman? He could be guilty."

"But?"

I shrugged. "I'm not con- vinced."

"Do your reservations have anything to do with Daddy Big Bucks?"

"Why do you ask?"

It was her turn to shrug. "I practically had to beat off the attorney he sent down to rep- resent his son. He got there about five minutes after I did and was not at all happy when he found out I was representing the junior Bayman." She chuc- kled. "That's the closest I've ever seen a grown lawyer come to throwing a temper tantrum."

"What about the others who were arrested?"

"People with those kinds of records know the drill. They had lawyers there in a flash."

"Do you think you can find out who hired those lawyers, Aggie?"

She frowned. "Probably. It

might not be easy, though, and I think I need to be spending my time preparing my case, which, from the looks of things, is not going to be an easy job."

"If you can find out who hired those lawyers, I mean who *really* hired them, you might not have to worry about preparing a case."

She looked at me sideways. "Do you know something I don't know, Hunter?"

"I know several things, but I'm not sure how the pieces fit together or if they even fit together at all."

"Give me a for instance."

"For instance, last night's activity was the most that warehouse had seen in at least a week, probably more."

"How do you know that?"

"A respectable amount of dust and some boxes and crates that were there at two this morning were exactly the way they were a few nights ago at approximately the same time."

She covered her ears. "Don't tell me more. Please."

I grinned, and she uncovered her ears and gave me an appropriately disapproving look.

"Aside from the fact that you're talking inadmissible evidence, a little dust doesn't prove anything. They said they only averaged two loads a week."

"There was also no computer, personal or otherwise, in the office. And if you're going to all

the trouble of printing phony bills of lading and bills of receipt, wouldn't you want them on file to complete the image of a legitimate business? I couldn't find any, and neither could Tyler."

She groaned. "Was Tracey a willing accessory?" She held up both hands. "Don't bother to answer that." Her dark brown eyes met mine. "Hunter, you have no tangible proof, no admissible evidence. Anything you say at this point could and would be used against you."

"I know. But I also know that I'm much closer to the truth than the police are."

Aggie studied me for what seemed a long time. "So what do I do?"

"Find out who hired those lawyers." I leaned back in my chair. "And start preparing for court. Just in case."

After putting Aggie in a cab, I returned to the office and the three bank statements. I went over each of them twice, comparing them to the information Jefferson Bayman had supplied and comparing them to each other. After making a few phone calls and setting up a few appointments, I called Tyler at home and asked her to come in early the next morning. I elicited another favor from Charlie Whisk.

Then I went home and spent a restless night.

I didn't like the way the evidence was shaping up, and if things turned out the way they appeared to be heading, I didn't know how I would prove it.

It was midafternoon when I got to the office. Tyler, looking terrific in pink and navy blue, followed me into my office.

"Charlie brought those about an hour ago." She indicated a sheaf of computer printouts. "He was pleased with himself."

"He probably had to break several access codes. That always gets his juices going."

"Also, I got that information you wanted." She moved aside the printouts to reveal a green folder. "And I called Agnes, who called her friend at the police department, who suddenly became very cooperative. I wonder what she has on him?"

"I'd be afraid to ask."

"She said to thank you for the dinner last night."

"No smart remarks, please."

"And she also said she'd have that information you wanted by late this afternoon. She said something about the trail being muddier than she expected. I guess that makes sense to you."

I nodded. "Unfortunately."

"What's wrong?"

"I didn't say anything was wrong." I began sorting through the printouts.

"That bad, huh?"

I looked up into those bottomless hazel eyes and wondered, for the I've-lost-count time, about her uncanny ability to read my mind.

She smiled softly. "You'll figure it out, Hunter." She returned to her desk.

I wanted to ask her which "it" she was referring to, but managed to restrain myself.

When Aggie called, she confirmed my suspicions.

"All's fair in love and corporate business." Even without knowing the whole story, she had enough to reaffirm her belief in the basic-black nature of man.

"I thought it was love and war."

"Same difference."

I promised to call and fill her in as soon as I could. Then I walked to the window overlooking Vine Street and stood, hands in pockets, watching the traffic. When I turned, Tyler was standing in the doorway. I moved to my desk and pulled my jacket from the back of the chair.

"You can go home, Tracey," I said, shrugging into the suit coat. "I have business to finish."

"Bayman?"

I nodded. She reached around and straightened the back of my collar.

"Be careful, Hunter."

"Aren't I always?"

"No."

"Tell me, Mr. Hunter, just how you arrived at the preposterous conclusion that I had my son framed."

Morris Bayman sat, that humorless smile on his face, behind a large walnut desk in an expensively spartan office. Tall windows rose directly behind him, making his facial features indistinct. I read somewhere that there was supposed to be some psychological advantage to positioning oneself that way. Maybe it operates on the same principle as shining a bright light in someone's eyes while you interrogate him in a hot, smoky room.

It had no effect on me. I was busy being angry about having been used. If I'd had to look into the eyes of the man who so coldly and with such calculation was putting his son behind bars, I'm not sure I would have been able to maintain what I hoped was coming across as cool and detached professional behavior.

"Several things."

"Such as?"

"Such as the nagging feeling I've had all along that something wasn't right."

"While I have very little regard for, and even less faith in,

'nagging feelings,' it appears that something *wasn't* right. My son is a crook."

"That's what I thought at first. That's what you wanted me to think. You gave me very little time to do the job and then you gave me the information you wanted me to have."

"You led me to that warehouse, knowing perfectly well that your son hadn't used it for six months. The location and the daytime traffic flow were making it inconvenient. You indirectly gave your approval to his decision to abandon it and also, again by proxy, suggested he hang on to the property and look for other ways to use it before making any decision to sell it." I made a conscious effort to relax tensing muscles. "How many nights did those two men have to play their little early morning charade before I saw them?"

The smile wavered, and the shrug of his shoulders was barely perceptible. I continued.

"I have to give you credit. Most people would have gone overboard with their staged evidence, but to make me suspicious, you relied on something as simple as an empty warehouse that, according to you, shouldn't have been."

"And it might have worked except for two things."

"I'm fascinated."

"Your unquestioning acceptance of my findings and your inflated check."

"Isn't it natural for a father to want to hear that his son is not involved in illegal activities?"

"For most fathers, yes. But the one thing that came through loud and clear when I talked to some of the people who work for you is that you don't readily accept anything anyone tells you because you don't trust the judgment of other people. Yet you quickly accepted the word of a complete stranger, even after I told you I wasn't completely satisfied with the outcome of the investigation."

I thought I saw an eyebrow arch, but shadows can be tricky. I continued.

"Then you wrote a check for twice what it should have been. What was that? A bribe? Or was I supposed to be so dazzled by your generosity that I forgot everything else?"

"Money talks. And the bigger the amount, the louder the voice."

"That was part of your mistake. You assumed I could be bought." I unclenched my jaws. "You were wrong."

Again he shrugged, as if to say it was a minor, inconsequential miscalculation.

"You were so sure of yourself that you let your son find out

you were having him investigated. Or maybe you wanted him to find out, hoping that his well-known temper would find its way back to me and confirm my suspicions. You didn't count on his hiring me to find out who was slandering him. But maybe you didn't care about that, either. Overconfidence can lead to mistakes, and you made a big one when you underestimated me.

"Is that why you came to me instead of going to one of the larger agencies here or in Louisville? You thought I wouldn't be smart enough to put together scattered, seemingly unconnected pieces of information?"

"I find all of this quite amusing, Mr. Hunter. Are you enacting a scene from one of your books?"

His voice was infuriatingly patronizing. I kept a strong rein on my roiling anger.

"If you find that amusing, just wait until you hear the rest of what I've found."

"Please, continue. I am a captivated audience."

"You hired those two men I saw. You hired the truckload of stolen goods. You hired the men who did the unloading. You bribed the manager. You arranged for the phony paperwork and the computer and the anonymous tip. You paid all

those men handsomely, promised them good attorneys. Maybe even good jobs elsewhere in the country. Who knows what else would come out if one of them decided to talk." I paused. "But they won't talk, will they? They've been paid too well. And with the smart lawyers they have, they probably won't spend too much time behind bars."

Bayman steeped his fingers in front of his mouth. I went on.

"What you didn't know was that I was there at the warehouse the night of the arrest. In fact, I was just leaving when the truck arrived."

"Two counts of breaking and entering. Tsk, tsk, Mr. Hunter."

"It isn't breaking and entering when you have permission, and I would say that being employed by the owners constitutes permission."

He waved his hand. "Go on, Mr. Hunter."

"There was no computer in the office and no paperwork in the files less than six months old. Pretty sloppy, wouldn't you say?"

"I've always said my son was not a smart businessman."

"Ah, but you're wrong. Everyone I talked to, whether they liked him or not, said he is a good businessman. Thorough, with an attention to detail that could be maddening. Detail that included accurate

and meticulous record-keeping."

The smile appeared to be wavering; with Bayman it was difficult to tell. But I didn't need Tyler's witch-like perception to be aware of the animosity that was rolling across the desk in a wave.

"I learned something else when I talked to a few of your people. None of them would gain anything substantial enough to warrant the risk involved in setting your son up. That only leaves one person."

"Tell me, Hunter, just for the sake of playing along with this fantasy of yours, why I did all this. Why did I orchestrate my son's arrest?"

His dropping of the polite "Mr." didn't escape my notice.

"He's not your son. Not your natural son, anyway. He was two years old when you married his mother. You adopted him a year later. Did you know then that there would be no other children?"

He ignored my question. "No secret has ever been made of the adoption. It makes him no less my son."

"Maybe not in the eyes of the law, but what about in your own eyes? You come from a long line of Baymans, a bloodline. It had to do something to your ego to know that the bloodline would end with you, that the family

would be carried on in name only. For some people that makes no difference. For a family with a long tradition—"I let the sentence hang unfinished.

"So because he isn't my biological son, I concocted an elaborate scheme to have him arrested." He snorted. "That's the most preposterous thing you've said yet. If that's the sort of motive you use in your novels, I wonder that you've had any career at all."

"I didn't say it was the reason you had him framed. But it did make it easier. No, you arranged all this because you needed your son out of the way for a while."

"Wouldn't a business trip or a vacation be much less expensive, not to mention more private?"

"You needed him out of the business. You need control of his share of the company, at least temporarily. A vacation or a business trip wouldn't accomplish that."

"I'm sure you're going to enlighten me about why I need control of *his* share of *my* company."

"My secretary has a friend at the paper who says your company has been mentioned, more than once, in connection with several business deals involving the takeover of a couple of smaller companies and the de-

velopment of some lucrative real estate. Your son has gone on record as, if not opposing those deals outright, at least having doubts about the soundness of the investments."

"He has expressed some concern over the losses the companies in question have sustained over the last two years. But that's part of his problem. He's never been able to accept the fact that you may have to lose money for a year or two before you start turning a profit. He's not a risk-taker."

"I find that difficult to believe. After all, you raised him." That couldn't have been a picnic. "Your son opposed the real estate deals because it meant putting quite a few people out of their homes."

"That's another of his failings. He's too sentimental."

"Whatever his 'failings,' as you call them, he was against your proposed deals, and if he was against them, your wife might well follow his lead. How much trouble would that cause you? How difficult would it be for you to finalize those deals without their approval?"

He remained silent. The smile was definitely gone.

"You have no proof."

"I have what I saw and didn't see in that warehouse. My secretary can corroborate part of that. I have a copy of the check

you gave me and a copy of the report I gave you. I know that there are some recent substantial withdrawals from your accounts that seem out of the ordinary. I know that the lawyers representing the men arrested with your son were contacted by lawyers in the firm that handles your legal affairs."

"Circumstantial evidence. And flimsy circumstantial evidence at that."

"Maybe. Each piece by itself means nothing. But all together they add up to something too big to be ignored. I've seen the police start investigations with less." I paused. "Were you planning on a speedy trial and conviction? Is that why you already had a lawyer hired for your son? Did he have instructions to speed up the process by not asking for postponements and not preparing a good case? Then what were you going to do? Finalize your deals as soon as possible and hire another lawyer to file an appeal and maybe find new evidence that would clear your son?"

"Actually, I planned to hire

you to find the evidence that would clear him."

The smile was back, more snake-like than ever. I had an overwhelming urge to rip it from his face. Tyler would have been proud of my self-control.

"And I would have gotten another inflated check. Perhaps to soothe a guilty conscience because my first investigation missed something important."

"You have no proof, Hunter."

At least none you can take to court. I doubt you even have anything you can take to the police without incriminating yourself in some way."

"What I don't have I can get." I stood up. "And I promise you I will get it."

I turned and started for the door.

"You can't win, Hunter."

I paused, my hand on the doorknob, and turned back toward him.

"Whom are you trying to convince? Me or yourself?"

His voice lost its politeness. "I underestimated you once, Hunter. It won't happen again."

It was my turn to smile.

"I know."

SOLUTION TO THE JULY "UNSOLVED":

Mr. Draper is the grocer.



MYSTERY CLASSIC

Ten Clues for Mr. Polkinghorn

by Charlotte Armstrong

M r. Amos Polkinghorn, forty-nine, creator of Daniel Dean, Ace Detective (whose cases no lending library would be without), walked down the driveway of his suburban home one morning to peer up the street for the mailman. The mailman was not even on the horizon. Mr. Polkinghorn, walking back, was very much startled to see, on the edge of the glass curtains in the window next door, a set of fingers.

This was odd because the house next door was empty. The family was away.

The fictional Daniel Dean would have taken this without a quiver of an eyelash. But Mr. Polkinghorn found his own mouth dry, his knees weak, his heart flopping. He staggered to refuge within his front door and took a full minute to get his breath before he called the police.

Nor, during the interval before they came, could he think of a single clever ruse. Meanwhile the mailman appeared. Mr. Polkinghorn did absolutely nothing to warn the mailman. He watched (taking care not to let his own fingers or any other part of him show at his window) as the mailman went up on the Arnolds' porch and put the letters in the slot and returned to the sidewalk as safely as usual. Mr. Polkinghorn, much relieved, reminded himself that he, Mr. Polkinghorn, was actually doing all a citizen is expected to do; that it was only his occupation that caused this habit of mind, engendered this self-reproach, made him feel that he *ought* to have disguised himself as the mailman. Or something.

By the time the police came, in the shape of a couple of men in plainclothes, Mr. Polkinghorn had managed to work himself into an attitude of intrepid curiosity becoming to a mystery story writer. He observed that the plainclothesmen had no ruse. They marched around, found the Arnolds' back door unlocked and nobody in the house.

On the kitchen table, however, was a big fat clue. The situation developed a certain piquancy.

The police officers' names were Connors and Farley. They knew who Mr. Polkinghorn was, and what he did, and they didn't mind telling him all they knew about this matter. In fact, Mr. Polkinghorn noted within himself, the situation was classic. The regular police were presenting the amateur criminologist with a pretty little problem.

Mr. Polkinghorn sat at the Arnolds' kitchen table and listened, lifting his somewhat snub nose in unconscious longing for the hawklike profile of his creature, Daniel Dean.

Conners said, "Well, sir, this plain cloth cap was made and worn in the state prison. No doubt about that. Now, ten days ago, three convicts escaped. The alarm's still out. But we *know* what happened to two of them. Seems one night, a week ago, two men showed up in a boatyard upshore a ways and knocked down a fella fussing with his sailboat. He didn't get a good look, but he knew they were convicts, all right, from what he heard them say. So they took the boat and went off into the Sound. Boat capsized in a quick squall. Witnesses to the wreck searched all night, found no bodies. Haven't found them yet. But those two couldn't have made it to shore. So we *know* that two of those three men got themselves drowned. Now, sir, according to the evidence of this cap, the *third* escaped convict may have holed up in this house for the last week or so. Question is, which one was he?"

"This matters?" said Mr. Polkinghorn, casting a keen glance upward. "Yes, I see."

"Matters because if you got the alarm out for a man, it's better to know who the man is," said Farley. He was youngish and had a nice Irish grin.

"Very interesting," Mr. Polkinghorn pursed his lips.

"You saw his fingers less than forty minutes ago. He couldn't have got very far. Maybe he'll be picked up. Maybe not." Conners implied vast police machinery in motion. "Be easier if we knew which one we were looking for."

"One ought," said Mr. Polkinghorn thoughtfully, "to be able to deduce that." The two policemen were respectfully silent. "How did he dare hide in this house? How did he know it was empty and would remain empty?" mused Mr. Polkinghorn, his wits beginning to work in familiar grooves.

Conners said, "Because this Miz Arnold, she pinned a note on the back door for the milkman. Here it is. Says, no milk for ten days. Says, back Tuesday, the tenth."

"And that's tomorrow," Farley said. "The man could read, I guess."

"A reasonable deduction," said Mr. Polkinghorn with Daniel Dean's most charming smile.

"Well, we got the Arnolds on the phone and they're hurrying right back. Be here in a coupla hours. Probably they can tell us if anything's missing, for instance."

"It's quite possible," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "that in the meantime we can discover something. I doubt very much, gentlemen"—he was talking just like Daniel Dean. He couldn't help it.—"whether

a man can remain in a house for a week's time and leave no traces of his personaltiy. We should be able to find those traces. That is, if you can tell me anything about the personalities of these three convicts."

"Tell you what we know?" said Conners. "Sure."

Mr. Polkinghorn took out pencil and paper. He was thrilled and happy. He saw the publicity already. Noted Mystery Writer Solves Police Problem in Real Life. "It was," he could hear himself saying with a twisted smile, "elementary."

"One of them," said Conners, "was named Mario Cossetti. Age twenty-nine. Caucasian. Five foot five. One hundred fifty-five pounds. Dark hair, dark eyes. Dark complected. Artificial right foot. Lost foot in action; navy man. Up for armed robbery. This the kind of thing you mean?"

"Precisely," cried Mr. Polkinghorn, scribbling delightedly. "And anything more about his background?"

"New York City. Lower East Side. Never finished high school."

"Very good."

"Yeah. Well, then there was Glenway Sparrow. Age forty-two. Caucasian. Five foot eleven. One twenty-five pounds. Gray eyes, gray hair." Conners warmed up to this work. "Never in the service. Four-F. Ex-editor. College man. Up for conspiracy to defraud. A con man, from way back. I hear," said Conners in a gossipy fashion. "Glen was real mad at the judge. Supposed to be mean and brainy and nervous about his health."

Mr. Polkinghorn was making neat columns out of this information.

"Third fella was Matthew Hoose. Age twenty-four. Six foot one. One ninety-five pounds. Red hair, blue eyes. Had two years' service in the army, where his record was only fair. Went up for manslaughter. Fight in a bar. Comes from Kentucky. Unemployed at time of arrest. Just an unlucky kid, I guess."

"What do you say, Mr. Polkinghorn?" Farley grinned. "Maybe I should ask what Daniel Dean would say."

Mr. Polkinghorn rose. He was expanding, happily at home in the safe province of the inquiring mind. "Daniel Dean would look around the house," he announced. "May I?"

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold and the boy, Bob, and the little girl, Ginny, had gone down to the seashore for Mr. Arnold's two weeks' vacation. They had long been very pleasant neighbors to Mr. Polkinghorn. Just an ordinary suburban family. Not, of course, his intimates, for they were hardly intellectuals, and not fans of his. Nor was

there anything about them to make fodder for Mr. Polkinghorn's imagination. Nods and good mornings passed over the hedge, amiable agreements about shoveling snow, and so on. Mr. Polkinghorn had never before set foot in this house.

Now, however, he prowled it, every room, with his eyes darting, his brain buzzing furiously. It was a big old rambling house stuffed full of all kinds of objects, and the tour took him some time.

At last, however, he sat down again in the kitchen chair and spread his notes on the kitchen table. Farley was already seated there, yawning a little. Conners, who had trailed Mr. Polkinghorn and stimulated him to lip-pursing and eye-rolling by a stolid presence, now sat down, too. These policemen had to wait for the Arnolds' return, anyhow. They were quite willing to listen when Mr. Polkinghorn looked up from rearranging his notes.

"It is a nice little problem," he announced. "A very nice one."

"Whatja find?" said Farley sleepily.

"What," said Mr. Polkinghorn somewhat dramatically, "do you make of that?" He indicated a small dirty scrap of paper on which something had been written in blurring, worn pencil marks.

"Tom may let ida po but asp san bag." Farley picked it up and read off the nonsense syllables. "Wherja get this?"

"Under a chair. How did they escape from that prison?" snapped Mr. Polkinghorn, in Daniel Dean's crisp voice. "With outside assistance?"

Conners stared.

"This code message," said Mr. Polkinghorn shrewdly, "must have served a purpose." They both stared at him respectfully. "I suggest it belonged to Sparrow," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Why? Because he was the brains. I think we may say that if there was a code message from the outside, it would have gone to Sparrow. However," he went on, joyfully dragging in the red herring just as he would have done in Chapter Two, "on the bookshelf in the living room there is a cotton sock. Perhaps you noticed it? New, clean, never worn. One blue and white cotton sock." He paused. They didn't respond. "Why only one?" prodded Mr. Polkinghorn. "Did Cossetti, the one-footed man, help himself to one clean sock to comfort his living foot? Not bothering about the artificial one?"

"See what you mean," said Conners, somewhat doubtfully.

"Not conclusive at all, of course," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Although I find two more slight indications that point to Cossetti."

"How many indications you got there?" said Conners amiably.

"Ten," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Of which *three* point to Cossetti,

one points possibly to Matthew Hoose, *one* may well eliminate him, and *five* of my little indications point, or so it seems to me, to this man Sparrow."

"So you'd say it was Sparrow?"

Mr. Polkinghorn didn't like people jumping to the end of the story. He liked the exposition for its own sake. "Let me continue," he said, chidingly.

They were silent.

"Now, to go on with Cossetti," he said. "You have noticed that on the kitchen counter, there, we see seven empty cans. Perhaps it is significant that they have not been thrown out to be collected. Perhaps the man who ate the contents of those seven cans did not wish them to be seen." His listeners nodded. "All seven of those cans," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "once held spaghetti."

"Italian!" said Farley. "And that's Cossetti." He looked impressed.

"Exactly. Now, I did not care to touch it since its position may be significant, but under the dining room table you may have noticed a long ropelike affair made of neckties, knotted together."

"Saw that," said Conners. "What's it for?"

Mr. Polkinghorn simply had been unable to imagine what it was for unless the unfortunate had thought of suicide (but surely not under the dining room table!), so he shrugged and said, "Whatever it is for, if you examined the knots, you saw that they are elaborate and all different. Whoever made that thing knew his knots. Didn't you tell me this Cossetti was in the navy?"

Their faces were blank. Stunned, he supposed. Mr. Polkinghorn cleared his throat. "But let us leave Cossetti for the moment and go on to Hoose. You noticed the empty liquor bottle? The *only* empty one? There is quite an ample and variegated supply in Mr. Arnold's liquor cupboard. But the kind that has been most recently taken is . . . bourbon."

"*Kentucky!*" said Farley. "Say, I'm getting on to this! What d'ya call it? Deducing?"

Mr. Polkinghorn was rather suspicious of the glance that now went between them. It had a winklike quality. He went on somewhat loftily, deliberately leaving the suspense about Hoose. "To return to Sparrow. Now, none of the beds, as you note, seems to have been disturbed. I can only imagine that the man, knowing himself to be hunted, preferred to snatch his sleep on the couch downstairs where he could more easily escape if anyone came. You remarked the afghan? The crushed pillows? Beside that long green

couch in the living room you must have seen, on the coffee table, those two empty aspirin bottles. Isn't it true that this man Sparrow was the only one of the three in less than robust health? He is the very thin man, the 4-F, the brainy, nervous, high-strung man. *He* would have been the one of the three to eat the aspirin." Mr. Polkinghorn swam along, his confidence increasing. "Also, you may have noticed the pile of old magazines on the floor in there. The scissors? Did you notice that small pieces have been clipped out of those magazines? Did you not tell me that this Sparrow was angry at some judge? Can you not imagine that he may have been composing an anonymous threat of some kind? Isn't it a well-known dodge to clip the words of the message from a magazine . . . ?" He could see by their faces that this was not going down very well. "A flight of fancy, perhaps," he said hastily, "but after all, the man was hiding here, all alone, and for so long a time. How did he occupy himself?"

"Eating spaghetti," said Farley faintly.

"I'll tell you what he did by daylight," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "He read. And what did he read? He read some very highbrow, intellectually demanding, books. He read, for instance, *The Secret History of the American Revolution*. He read a large volume of William James. The complete works of William Shakespeare."

"How do you know?"

"Why, there are six such books on the living room table, all out of obvious gaps in the shelf." (Mr. Polkinghorn experienced here a little bit of a qualm, for he had never known and wouldn't have suspected that his neighbors owned, let alone read, books like these. But he threw the fleeting and somewhat chastening enlightenment away.) "The next to the last clue," he pronounced, "is in the negative. It has to do with Arnold's clothing. Mr. Arnold is a large man. Now, we do not find any clothing here that pertains to the state prison, except that cap. It seems likely that our prisoner would have changed his prison-made garments for a suit of Mr. Arnold's, *if he could have*. But he didn't."

"How do we know he didn't?" demanded Conners.

"Where are the clothes he would have discarded?" asked Mr. Polkinghorn triumphantly. "Now remember those descriptions. Cossetti was short. Five foot five. Couldn't have worn Arnold's clothes. And by the same token, neither could Sparrow, who was so terribly thin. Hoose probably could have worn them. But nobody did. It wasn't Hoose. Therefore." To pronounce the word "therefore" at the end of a chain of reasoning was Daniel Dean's trademark,

and Mr. Polkinghorn used it with relish.

"How does it add up, again?" asked Conners, dubiously.

He's lost, thought Mr. Polkinghorn complacently. Don't suppose he is a chess player.

"Ten points," he recapitulated, glancing at his own neat handwriting where the points were listed in columns under the three names. "The sock for his one foot, the spaghetti for his Italian taste, the knots in the rope of neckties for his sailor's skill—these three seem to point to Cossetti. But we must remember *against* Cossetti the fact that he, the sailor, might be the leader of the two unfortunates who stole, of all things, a boat."

"Listen," said Farley, rather apologetically, "they didn't *do* so good with the boat. Also, Cossetti was on a battleship, which is not quite the same thing . . ."

"Now, the bourbon," Mr. Polkinghorn went on blithely, "does point faintly toward Hoose. But the clothing that has *not* been discarded here points clearly away from him and cancels out. Whereas," he rapped the table with his pencil, "the code message, the highbrow reading matter, the clipped magazines, the pill bottles, all point to Sparrow. And *this*," he said complacently, "seems to me to settle it."

"What's that, sir?"

"This," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "comes from the green couch in the living room and is a gray hair. Hoose had red hair. Cossetti's was black. But *Sparrow* has gray hair." He leaned back, placing the pencil between his lips, and murmured, as Daniel Dean was wont to do, "Sparrow. Therefore."

The two plainclothesmen looked uneasy—in fact, unconvinced. Farley had his brows way up and his lids way down and the stretched, blank flesh where the eyes should have been looked skeptical indeed. Conners was actually squirming. "I think I hear a car," he said, "must be the Arnolds."

Mr. Polkinghorn sat at the kitchen table, rolling the pencil in his lips. Ah well, he was thinking, I've told them so. Therefore, I can always say, I told you so. Of all glad words—he paraphrased—*de dum de dum*, the gladdest are, I told you so. Ah well, he'd enjoyed it. One could always make a pleasant little article out of this and turn a penny and of course nonfiction was the thing today.

Then Farley broke his dream by coming back into the kitchen with Mr. Arnold, who smiled and hailed him. "Hi, neighbor! Got *your* fancy brains to working on this crime, I hear."

"We'd like to know, sir—" Farley began.

"Don't ask *me*, sergeant," said Mr. Arnold humorously. "Kitty's roaring through the house." They could, indeed, all hear rapid footsteps upstairs. "She and the kids will spot anything there is to spot. It's no use asking me. I just pay the rent around here." He sat down and lit a cigarette—a big, careless, easygoing man. Mr. Polkinghorn couldn't help knowing that Mr. Arnold wasn't shaken in the least by this affair. "Stranger than fiction, huh?" said Mr. Arnold genially. "Well, well."

"I wonder," said Mr. Polkinghorn, with an easy smile, "whether you could tell us about the bourbon bottle."

"I can't stand bourbon," said Arnold immediately.

"Then you did not empty that bottle?"

"Eh? Oh, that," said Arnold. "Forgot to put it out in the barrel, didn't I? Well, as I say, I can't stand bourbon myself, but a chap from my office dropped by the night before we left, to pick up the threads, you know, while I was gone. *He* likes bourbon, so I got rid of it on him. Why?"

Polkinghorn drew his pencil across his list, under Hoose.

"What is all this?" inquired Arnold.

But Mrs. Arnold now came bursting through the swinging door. She was a plump little body with a great mass of chestnut hair that was not very tidy. She wore a cotton dress with a sweater over it. She had a pack of envelopes in her hand. "Fine bunch of mail, Jim," she said to her husband disgustedly. "It's ninety percent bills, as far as I can see. Oh, hello, Mr. Polkinghorn." She gave him a museum-type look. (She usually did.) As if her prim, withdrawn, and solitary neighbor was a kind of exhibit on earth. "I don't see a thing gone," she told the detectives, "except food. You say it was a criminal? Is *he* gone? Did you look in the cellar?"

"We looked, ma'am," said Farley.

"None of your husband's *clothing* is missing?" asked Mr. Polkinghorn briskly, concerned with his little list.

"I don't think so," she said. "His blue suit is at the cleaners. I asked them to hold it because he only needs that for business. What—?"

With a little confident smile, Mr. Polkinghorn was drawing a line across the name of Matthew Hoose.

"Sit down, ma'am," said Farley, "if you don't mind, and let's talk about this a little bit."

"Right," said Conners, who had come in after her.

"Okay," she said. "I told Bobby to stay upstairs, but don't think

he won't be listening behind the pantry door." She dropped the mail on the table and clasped her hands. "What can I tell you?"

"The thing is, we'd like to know *which* escaped convict was in here." Farley explained the little problem. "Now, Mr. Polkinghorn, he's got some ideas . . ."

"Busman's holiday? Ha-ha," boomed Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Polkinghorn was frowning wisely at his notes. He spoke up in a businesslike voice. "First, I wish you would tell me, if you can, what is the meaning of the rope of neckties?"

"What rope of neckties?" said Mr. Arnold, with a dropping jaw.

"The one under the dining room table."

"Bobby tied Ginny to the stake the day it rained," said Mrs. Arnold pleasantly.

Her husband said, "With whose neckties?"

"Now, Jim, you said you wished somebody would take pity on your weakness. You know you can't resist your favorite old ties even though the cleaner simply does not get them really clean. You said yourself—"

"You gave 'em to Bob!"

"I couldn't find any rope and he *said* he wanted to practice for his badge . . ."

"Knots," said Farley. "Boy Scout, is he? Yeah."

"I guess that takes care of my complex about my favorite old ties," said Bob's father resignedly. And then to Mr. Polkinghorn, "What about them?"

But Mr. Polkinghorn was making another pencil line, under Cossetti this time. "The one unused sock in the living room?" he inquired.

"Oh," said Kitty Arnold in a minute, "you mean the fourth sock?"

"The *fourth* sock?" Mr. Polkinghorn had a brief vision of a four-legged man, which he sternly dismissed.

"I made a rag doll for Ginny to take in the car, you know," she explained. "It takes three dime-store socks. *You* know." (Mr. Polkinghorn *didn't* know. He'd never heard of such a thing.) "So, of course, the fourth was just left over. But," she said comfortingly, "if I'd had twelve socks and made four dolls, the way I did for the bazaar, why, it would have come out even." She beamed at them.

Mr. Polkinghorn was crossing off the sock. He was thinking that Cossetti was fading nicely, and he was not displeased.

"Just to clear this away," he said, "tell me about those spaghetti cans."

"Do that," said Mr. Arnold. "Tell them, Kitty."

Kitty Arnold's plain face began to get pink.

"Seven cans," said Mr. Polkinghorn, "and all spaghetti. Is this what the man ate, would you say?"

"Well, no," she said, "I guess I *will* have to explain that. There was a church supper, pot luck, you know?" (He *didn't* know.) "There wasn't time," Mrs. Arnold went on. "We were packing to go away. So I took spaghetti for my contribution, but it wasn't homemade. I cheated," she confessed. "Oh, I threw in a little seasoning and nobody knew the difference."

"She's just a fraud," said her husband lovingly. "At the church, too. At least, in the basement." He chuckled.

She blushed deeper. "But the silliest thing was not to throw out all nine cans at once," she told them. "I guess I felt kind of guilty. I was afraid somebody might—well—notice. So I threw two out and I washed the rest . . . they are perfectly clean. But I thought I'd get rid of them, two at a time."

Mr. Arnold laughed heartily while Mr. Polkinghorn crossed off the third and last item under Cossetti and then his pencil came up and drew a line through that name. No logician on earth, Mr. Polkinghorn was thinking crossly, could have divined the real meaning of those spaghetti cans. However, it did get rid of Cossetti.

"What'd this man eat then, Miz Arnold?" asked Farley.

"Meat, I guess," she said. "And bread. I had at least two loaves in the freezer and the chopped meat looks to me awful low."

"Listen," said Mr. Arnold, "*that* doesn't necessarily mean a thing. This family kicks around one heck of a lot of hamburger."

Mr. Polkinghorn, gazing at him, was beginning to have a fuzzy feeling in his head.

"We don't seem to be getting anywhere with these points," said Conners, giving an impatient glance toward Mr. Polkinghorn. "Suppose you tell us what else you know about this man, Mrs. Arnold."

"Oh, I'd say he slept in Bobby's bed and read all Bobby's comic books," said Mrs. Arnold promptly.

"What makes you think that?" said Mr. Polkinghorn, outraged.

"Because the bed's so neat," she replied. "The corners are made hospital style, which I never bother to do. And so is the stack of comic books neat . . . neater than Bobby Arnold ever piled them . . ."

"Or ever will," sighed Bobby's father.

Mr. Polkinghorn shook his head, just slightly. It was almost a tremble.

"May I go on, please?" he asked in Daniel Dean's most

silken voice. "Tell me, please, why are bits clipped out of all those magazines?"

"Just Bobby," she said. "I never saw such a boy for 'sending away.'"

"Natural-born sucker for coupons," said Mr. Arnold. "Just have to learn the hard way."

"And Ginny collects rabbits," said Mrs. Arnold. "*Pictures of rabbits, that is. Ever since Easter. Nothing's safe.*"

Mr. Polkinghorn's head had begun to swim—quite perceptibly. But he reminded himself, hastily, that his point about the clippings had really been very farfetched. He drew a line through it and pressed on. "Those aspirin bottles in the living room? Who put them there?"

"Jeepers," said Kitty Arnold, casting her eyes down, "you are sure going to think I'm an awful sloppy housekeeper, Mr. Polkinghorn."

"You put them there?" Mr. Polkinghorn began to feel a real alarm.

"They're Jim's," she said. "He had the grippe a couple of weeks ago and nothing would do . . . *he* wasn't going to stay upstairs in his bed and miss television. So he languished in there on the living room couch. And I never did get around to throwing out those bottles. There's an awful lot to keep throwing out around here. But why—do you ask?"

Nobody answered. Mr. Polkinghorn marked the pill bottle off his list and then he lifted the pencil and crossed off the clue of the gray hair, too. His neighbor, Jim Arnold, had a head of pepper and salt and there just was no reliable significance . . . He looked with some dismay on the case for or against the man Sparrow. There were only two points left. Two, out of them all. And nobody was speaking. Were the policemen embarrassed for him? He lifted his head and drove hard with the one point he had felt most certain about.

"Who," he said with the faintest sneer, "if our friend was upstairs reading comic books, took out and read those six rather scholarly volumes on the living room table?"

Mrs. Arnold began to giggle. "Well," she said, controlling herself so that the giggles changed to mere dimples in her plump cheeks, "nobody was *reading* them, Mr. Polkinghorn. That is, not recently. You see"—she must have divined the chagrin he was feeling because she began to sound soothing—"if you knew the family better, Mr. Polkinghorn, and some of our habits . . . But no stranger could. We have a little projector for throwing transparencies on the wall.

Jim was showing some of them to the man from his office. The table's just too low," she said. "It takes those six fat books under the projector . . ."

"I . . . see," said Mr. Polkinghorn, struggling not to seem as disgruntled as he was. Daniel Dean *himself* couldn't have guessed there had been a projector! Impossible! "I suppose *this* is perfectly clear to you, too?" he said bitterly, and tossed her the last clue of all, the bit of paper with the mysterious symbols on it.

"This?" she said in a wondering tone. "Now, where in the world did you find that?"

"Under a chair," he said, gloomily. He had a foreboding that this would turn out to be a natural place for it.

"It's an old one," she said.

"An old *what*, Mrs. Arnold?" said Farley gently.

"What *is* it?" She looked at it closely. "Tomatoes, mayonnaise, lettuce, Idaho potatoes, butter, asparagus, sandwich bags," she read off glibly. "Why, it's a grocery list, of course. When did we have asparagus, Jim, and baked potato—"

"Never mind." Mr. Polkinghorn folded his list. He didn't care to throw it away in this house. He thought she might giggle. Her husband might guffaw. He thought, crossly, the whole affair would make good fiction, at least. His clues *should* have meant something. If these people didn't live in such a ridiculously giddy human kind of way . . .

"So," said Farley thoughtfully, "we know nothing about this guy but that he reads comic books."

"Who," said Mr. Polkinghorn bitterly, "doesn't?" His face was red and he stared at the wall.

Mrs. Arnold sensed that here was some wound she didn't fully understand. She had tact. She busied her fingers with the envelopes on the table before her. "Jim," she said suddenly and indignantly, "that darned telephone company has done it again! We don't know anybody in Paris, Kentucky, to call long distance."

"What!" said Farley. "Lemme see that. Thirty-first of last month. It could be."

"If you'll excuse me," said Mr. Polkinghorn with a really gruesome smile, "I'm afraid I have work to do." He went out the kitchen door and through the hedge and back to his sane, neat, lonely house.

It was the young one, Farley, who came around the next day to talk to Mr. Polkinghorn. "Thought you might like to know the upshot," he said kindly. "It was Matthew Hoose, all right. He's just

a big dumb wild kid. Went along for the escape because it seemed a good idea at the time. Didn't like the company he had. So they parted. He found the Arnold house and read on the back door how long it would be empty. So he goes right in, the night of the thirty-first, and calls up his mother back in Paris, Kentucky, and asks her for some money. Says he's no thief. All he took was the meat and the bread. So his mother *mailed* him the money. That's why he was watching for the mailman. He knew it was his last day there and he was getting anxious. Oh, they picked him up. Sure. Easy. In the railroad station. He's not," said Farley gently, "so terrible bright. Although the army did manage to teach him to make a bed."

"It was kind of you to come," said Mr. Polkinghorn graciously. "Thank you very much."

"Maybe life's *not* quite so strange as fiction," muttered Farley and he smiled his nice smile.

"For my part," said Polkinghorn stiffly, "I think the old saw holds."

He went back to his work table. He was plotting a new one for Daniel Dean. His glazed eye looked out of the window. After a moment it began to see.

Mrs. Arnold was making for her car with two henna-colored blankets over her shoulder. Bobby trailed after with both hands held together as if some precious thing were within the cup they made. Mr. Polkinghorn saw the mother glance within the cup of the boy's hand and nod and smile. The little girl, Ginny, was trailing a long white string after her on the grass. There was nothing on the end of the string. They all got into the car. Ginny sat on the two blankets. The boy had had nothing in his hands because now he was clapping them in a gay and jerky rhythm. Mrs. Arnold put her head out to watch behind as she backed out of the drive. She was, of all things, whistling loudly.

He had no idea what any one of them was up to or what was going on in any of their minds.

Mr. Polkinghorn sighed. He looked back at the paper and put a dainty little check mark on one of his notes: *Murderer must be ambidextrous.*

As for his neighbors, they were to him and would remain an impenetrable mystery.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

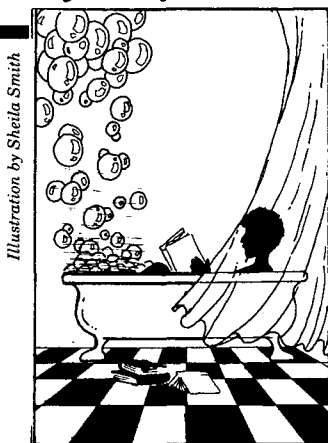


Illustration by Sheila Smith

Mystery novels with historical settings and even persons as characters seem to be especially invogue now. A recent novel by John R. Maxim entitled **TimeOut of Mind** is, quite frankly, a little longer on history than mystery. But no matter. *Time Out of Mind* is the tale of Jonathan Corbin, a successful young executive living in present-day New York City. Jonathan's secret terror is that he doesn't live entirely in modern Manhattan. Every time it snows, he finds himself walking the New York streets of an earlier era, almost a hundred years earlier. There is a deadly crime at the heart of this supernatural tale, but it's Maxim's portrait of another age and his detailed delineation of the characters who inhabit it that make this book so entertaining. (Houghton Mifflin, \$17.95, 502 pp.)

Teddy Roosevelt is among the supporting cast of players in *Time Out of Mind*, but he moves to center stage in Lawrence Alexander's **The Big Stick** (Doubleday, \$16.95, 348 pp.). This is a lot of fun and a jolly good idea, picking up T.R. in his younger days before he became involved in politics, or rode up San Juan Hill—focusing, in fact, on the period between 1895 and 1897 when Teddy was the police commissioner of the City of New York. There's lots to enjoy in this rousing tale: famous people are constantly making appearances, scenes of Teddy's home life (including portraits of Alice and her plain cousin Eleanor) are touchingly sincere, and the

plot—complete with fisticuffs, dangerous chases, and many of the elements one expects to find in adventure novels of the day—moves briskly. Although Alexander has obviously researched his novel, and asserts that all the incidents are based on historical record, he has employed the facts solely to entertain, using them to delight and surprise as well as to further the plot. This is old fashioned fun, and it promises to be but the first in a series of books centered around T. R. "Bully," I say!

There's a new edition of Anthony Boucher's classic, **The Case of the Baker Street Irregulars** (Carroll & Graf, \$3.95, 252 pp.), and if you're a Sherlock Holmes fan, you'll want to read this 1940 novel. The setting is Hollywood, where a tycoon producer is planning to film a version of Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." His problem is that the Baker Street Irregulars (a real group of Sherlock Holmes fans, then and now) strongly object to the choice of writer for the project. To appease them, and to add to the publicity surrounding the new picture, the producer invites a group of Irregulars (here Boucher created fictional Irregulars for his novel) to stay in a house he rents in Hollywood, and to advise him as the film is shot. Unfortunately, the detested writer is shot first—or is he, for the corpse is missing? Boucher has a lot of fun with his Holmes fans, with a plot that even the players themselves find implausible—until all is revealed, of course. As the Irregulars match wits with a criminal mind in their midst, the reader gets to match wits with the Irregulars, for the clues are all there for anyone very familiar with the Doyle canon.

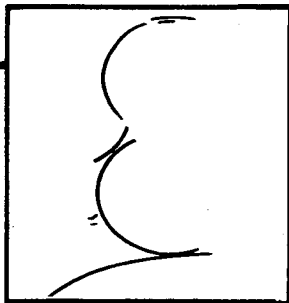
British author Michael Gilbert has written a number of excellent novels, and **The Black Seraphim** (Penguin, \$3.50, 216 pp.) doesn't disappoint, either. The protagonist is the young James Scotland, a respected but overworked pathologist who, on doctor's orders, goes to the cathedral town of Melchester for a rest. What he finds is a very *untranquil* atmosphere of dissension and infighting among the cathedral hierarchy. The residents of the cathedral close become even more isolated from the surrounding townsfolk when one of their elder members dies peacefully—or did he? When another death occurs, Scotland can't help but suspect murder, a suspicion that doesn't make his vacation especially relaxing, nor does it further his growing romance with the dean's daughter. A well-written and well-crafted mystery in the best British tradition, with an engaging young protagonist, an assortment of the requisite "characters" and eccentrics, and a fascinating look behind the scenes at a large British cathedral.

Some time ago this column profiled Stephen Greenleaf's novels featuring ex-lawyer and private eye John Marshall Tanner. Only four were written then, so I'm pleased to announce that the fifth book in the series, **Beyond Blame**, is now available (Villard Books, \$15.95, 290 pp.). Tanner reluctantly accepts as clients the parents of a woman who has been brutally murdered, a woman known in the Berkeley, California, area for her social activism. The crime and its method smack of madness and haywire violence; ironically, the woman's husband is a professor/lawyer who has achieved celebrity status for successfully defending clients under the insanity plea. There's a daughter who has lately run away and joined a group of crazy druggies, and there's a bitter enemy of the professor's at the law school where both men teach. The list goes on in what, to Tanner, begins to resemble a hopeless tangle of self-seeking suspects. And for Tanner the hardest part is dealing with the lawyer/professor's shattered life—the "good life" that Tanner once envisioned for himself, in the days before he went to jail for contempt of court, in the days when Berkeley itself was a symbol of hope rather than a monument to decay. Ride along with Tanner as he goes back into Berkeley's past as well as his own. It's a trip worth taking, and Tanner's guesses do turn out to be correct.

If you're looking for something different, pick up Peter Ackroyd's **Hawksmoor** (Harper & Row, \$16.95, 217 pp.). This isn't a mystery in the conventional sense, although the title bears the name of a weary senior police officer in contemporary London. The framework is his investigation of a series of murders on the sites of certain eighteenth century churches. But the meat of the tale is told in another voice, even in another language, as Nicholas Dyer—eighteenth century architect and believer in Santanism, designer of the murder sites—relates his own story. Don't read this if you read mystery novels for the resolution of a plot puzzle, for *Hawksmoor* doesn't offer that kind of conclusion. Instead, it does reward readers with two compellingly drawn characters, with keenly evocative portraits of two very different Londons, two very different eras. Ackroyd's research has even influenced the architect's narration, for he speaks unmistakably period English. A tour de force, but definitely not every mystery lover's cup of tea.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



For some of us there can never be too many adaptations of 1930's detective stories, especially those written by Raymond Chandler. The Home Box Office cable network did a series of hour-long Philip Marlowe adventures in 1983, and has added six more this year under the title **Philip Marlowe, Private Eye**. Powers Boothe plays Chandler's Marlowe with unemphatic confidence and, unlike some of his predecessors, looks as though he can take a punch.

The productions are not lavishly mounted, but the clothing and cars nicely evoke the 1930's. In fact, HBO's modern adaptation is more authentic in terms of period style than the first great Philip Marlowe movies made by Hollywood in the 1940's.

But capturing the Chandler

style on screen is not just a matter of period settings. Harder to reproduce is the atmosphere of menace produced by his clipped sentences. These convey a vague but palpable feeling of tension that builds toward some unpredictable act of violence. Take "Blackmailers Don't Shoot," the first in the new HBO series. As it happens, this was Chandler's first story—a complicated one but expertly crafted to the action requirements of the pulp magazine *Black Mask* where it appeared. At one point, a crooked cop and his accomplices seize the detective hero and take him for a ride. Sitting in the back with his prisoner, the cop alternately belts down slugs of whisky and punches the detective. Throughout the scene the cop's percolating fury threatens to explode, but its source only

gradually becomes evident. His underworld boss has tricked him not only into seizing the detective, but also into kidnapping a female movie star, and he draws the line at kidnapping. His violence is really directed at his boss, not the detective.

In Chandler's version, the reader initially knows nothing about either the cop, whose name is Macdonald, or the detective, Mallory, apart from how the one throws punches ("not hard") and how the other takes them (reflectively). The plot unfolds, resolving itself in a succession of violent clarifications. On the HBO screen things

work rather differently. Chandler's detective Mallory is transformed into Philip Marlowe.

But there is a great deal of difference between introducing a mysterious character named Mallory as a blackmailer of the actress who is eventually kidnapped, as Chandler's version does, and having the famous Philip Marlowe be hired to protect the actress, then decide to pretend that he is blackmailing her. With Marlowe as the dependable hero there is only the mystery of the kidnapping; with Mallory, the story turns first on the mystery of his identity as a detective, then on his motives, and finally on his skill.

We won't go into the accompanying plot changes, except to mention that neither the glamorous Hollywood of the movie set nor the love interest ever appeared in Chandler's original. As for dialogue, the producers are positively proud of having brought what they call Chandler's "period prose" up to date. This means that altogether *Philip Marlowe, Private Eye* contains plots, characters, and dialogue none of which can be found in Raymond Chandler's originals. This much understood, the series can be recommended as a stylized and stylish entertainment attractively filmed in externally convincing 1930's settings.



Powers Boothe as Philip Marlowe in the new HBO presentation of "Blackmailers Don't Shoot."

THE STORY THAT WON



The March Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Gary Riggs of Lansing, Michigan. Honorable mentions go to Linda Sherman of Shipman, Virginia; Donna K. Nesbitt of Bellingham, Washington; William F. Smith of Garden Grove, California; Terrance V. McArthur of Sanger, California; Wanda Blank Freynick of Alexandria, Virginia; William Geer of West Valley City, Utah; Elisa Gilbert of Chicago, Illinois; Norma J. Joyner of Medford, Oregon; Lee Ellis of Jasper, Tennessee; John A. Brosnan of Oradell, New Jersey; Steve Burrell of Fort Worth, Texas; and Ellane Caveney of Owosso, Michigan.

PREPPED FOR DEATH by Gary Riggs

As schoolboys they roomed together, learned to smoke and drink together. And so it was that at their class reunion by the sea they died together—in their school ties and derbies. The pier collapsed and crushed them where they rested in its shade.

Autopsies disclosed lethal amounts of antifreeze in their bodies, traceable to the wine they'd been drinking. Some question whether they might actually have died of poisoning. Thus Jack Swain, the sole survivor—and the one who'd brought the wine—was tried for manslaughter.

"My lord," said counsel for the defense, "I've no doubt of my client's innocence. Even though the wine was tainted, and several of his mates fell ill; and regardless that some became unconscious, and that some appeared to have stopped breathing altogether, *before* the pier caved in.

"However, let us not lay their deaths to the charge of Master Swain. May we not rather interpret the disaster which befell them as divine retribution for their mindless conformity? In their youth they forsook their individuality—whatever principles they might have had—and followed the pattern of dissipation set for them by their models. All to win the acceptance of their fellows, which was dearer to them than personal integrity. Their bodies died at the seashore, yes—but their souls died at school."

"How say you, then?" queried the weary judge. "How *did* they die?"

"Why, naturally, my lord," answered counsel; "they succumbed to 'pier' pressure!"

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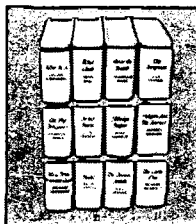
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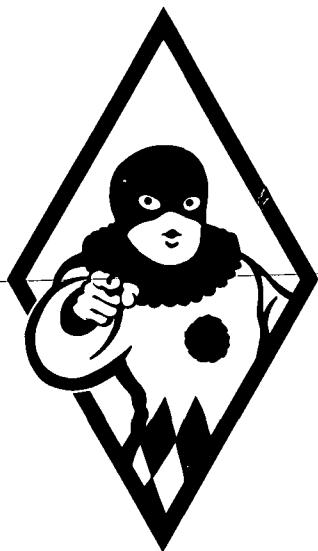


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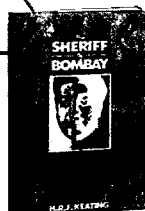
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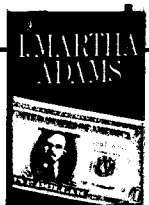
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